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ABSTRACT

Drawing on presentations and informal discussions from a gathering at the University of Dayton (Ohio) in 1995, this book examines Catholic secondary education and campus ministry. Following a foreword by Mary Frances Taymans, the booklet includes three essays: "Patterns and Possibilities" (James Heft); "Conversation as a Mode of Faith" (Thomas Groome); and "Religious Education in Catholic Secondary Schools: Patterns and Possibilities for the '90s and Beyond" (Lars J. Lund). The essays provide information on teaching religion, campus ministry, curriculum and instruction, and spiritual and professional development at Catholic schools and universities. The booklet provides practical applications for classroom religious education and campus ministry. (RJC)

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PATTERNS AND POSSIBILITIES: EXPLORING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

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PATTERNS AND POSSIBILITIES: EXPLORING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And He told them many things in parables..." *Matt 13:1-3*

Thus, it happened during a recent summer at the University of Dayton. Catholic secondary school religion teachers and campus ministers gathered. In parable, presentation, conversation, prayer and presence, Jesus was in the midst. The sea was lacking but the rolling hills of Ohio and the hospitality of the University of Dayton community created comparable ambience.

What happens at any point in time constitutes one type of experience for those immediately involved but also has meaning for those who relive it vicariously. This is true of the Gospel, the great events in history, the movies we call classics, the books known as great, traditional family gatherings, and community rituals. Putting on a strand of pearls handed down from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter; fingering a picture album; re-reading a poignant Scripture passage; walking through an art gallery; these are all fraught with memory and message. (Interestingly all are quite low tech.)

There are parallels with this manuscript. There was a point in time when Jim Heft, Tom Groome, and Lars Lund, along with 150 Catholic high school campus ministers and religion teachers, came together for conversation about the significant issues shaping these two important ministries, the teaching of religion and campus ministry. The dialogue

was too valuable to leave behind when the conference closed. It was also too large and too important not to continue with an expanded audience. Each author has a message for the Catholic education community, broadly defined. In addition to those in the Catholic secondary school community, all who are drawn to reflect on both the existing patterns and the emerging possibilities for religious education, and those who treasure and probe what we mean by our Catholic identity will find a feast for thought and stimulus for conversation in these pages.

The three essays develop from distinct personal and professional experiences. From the leadership perspective of university professor and administrator, scholar and author, Jim Heft blends wit and insight, reflection and practice as he targets the emphases in teaching and ministry appropriate for today's adolescent, grappling with matters of faith and personal decision. Thomas Groome, teacher of teachers, religious educator par excellance and author, employs his great gift for conversation to lead and engage the reader in a virtual dialogue that points to the need for narrative in order to attach significance to knowledge. The dynamic nature of faith, spirituality, and knowledge are felt in the dialectic around adolescence, religious education, and faith development. Lars Lund, writing from the perspective of campus minister, religion teacher and religious studies department chair brings forward both his experience in secondary school religious education and his reflection. His particular dedication to leadership development in this area makes a significant contribution.

So, whether you were there at the University of Dayton or whether you join the reflection and conversation at this point, you are invited to find a place by a "peaceful sea", gather your colleagues, and enjoy the conversation that will follow your reading and reflection.

"... and he told them many things in parables..."

Foreword

hat follows in this book are three pieces drawn from the many presentations and informal discussions that marked a significant gathering at the University of Dayton in the summer of 1995. It was then and there that 200 educators who have pivotal roles in Catholic secondary school religious education and campus ministry came together to examine the *patterns* of religion teaching and campus ministry along with the *possibilities* in these two all important fields.

It was about the art and craft of teaching religion and campus ministry; about curriculum and instruction; about spiritual and professional development, but most importantly, it was about, and was, an expression of our identity as Catholic schools, our Catholic identity.

The commitment to on-going academic excellence as a component of Catholic identity extends beyond religious education to all aspects of the academic program. One implication of this is the realization that in order to provide quality educational experiences, new types of collaboration, connecting schools, diocesan education offices, businesses and institutions of higher education, need to be consciously planned and developed. The conference that was the genesis of this publication is an example of such collaborations and partnerships. NCEA, the University of Dayton, Boston College, Thomas More College, Xavier University, and the College of Mount St. Joseph all contributed to the overall richness of the experience for the participants.

Before presenting these three esteemed authors and their poignant

and probing messages it seems pertinent to spend a few moments filling in the sketch of Catholic identity. In their landmark pastoral letter, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, the bishops describe the institutional elements characteristic of Catholic identity—message, community and service.[1]

Message

As an element of Catholic identity, message is defined and transmitted through teaching in the broadest sense of the word. In the formal context, teaching in Catholic schools includes both imparting religious concepts and teaching all subjects well. Teaching religious concepts encompasses biblical values, Church teachings and tradition, and moral issues affecting both personal and social actions. Message implies actively engaging students in understanding, probing, and responding to each of these areas, telling the story, and asking the imaginative question that links reflection and sharing. It addresses what Alfred McBride describes as the "...complexity of human situations that are part of the adventure of becoming a Christian moral person."[2] It is, above all, a message whose central reality is Jesus and offers an invitation to decision.

The research shows that done well this informational and formational teaching results in people who, according to Andrew Greeley, are "change-oriented and flexible; secure in both their world-view and their loyalty to past tradition and values."[3] The message is clear; the challenge is personal appropriation.

Community

Community, as an element of Catholic identity, is both a known asset and a challenge. The challenge lies in the on-going effort needed to consciously and creatively support community as a reality and value in ways that are appropriate at the local level. Catholic schools have the power to both draw from and contribute to the larger Church community, because of shared religious values. Common prayer and celebration, sacramentality, inclusiveness, and culture all mark the community as Catholic and express the richness of this reality. We can say with James Joyce that Catholic means "... here comes everybody."

The role of teachers in the lives of students is a documented asset for students and a significant component of school as community. Teachers assume a variety of roles: campus minister, coach, advisor, counselor, activity moderator. These relationships are more than functional and nurture an empowerment shaping student attitudes, decisions, and value

formation. James Coleman speaks of this powerful community influence in terms of "social capital." It is an environment where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and occurs when an adult community collectively contributes to a young person's development. The student experiences a common ground of message, values, and expectations that create a safe environment for growth.

Service

Service as a characteristic of the Catholic identity of Catholic schools is described as reaching out to those in need after studying the Gospel and Christian social ethic. It is rooted in a focus and conviction that the dignity of the human person, justice, honesty, and freedom are worth every effort. Service is a characteristic that has been both studied and described. In a descriptive analysis of on-going survey data of high school seniors in United States, Michael Guerra and others[4] reported that Catholic school students have a vision of a just social world. Catholic school students reported that they were involved in a wide range of service areas and indicated intent to continue such service after graduation. The history of service and its expression has a rich and varied history in Catholic high schools. It shapes many an alum's memories of high school and often gives reality to the school's specific mission.

In summary, the Catholic identity of a school is rooted in beliefs and values and is expressed through:

- teaching all subjects well in the light of Gospel values;
- forming community in the midst of a Faith-filled people; and,
- creating a distinctive climate that includes a commitment to service and global concern.

It is a public identity directed toward an adult expression that is intentional about being Catholic and takes ownership for the mission of the Catholic Church. As Yeats would say, it is not of the mind alone but requires thinking in the marrow of one's bones. Further, it is both experiential and self-critical as well as symbolic, imaginative, and rational. It is embodied in the graduate who accepts authority based on competence, whose religious expression is culturally appropriate, and who has a preferential option for the poor.[5] This does not imply that Catholic schools produce graduates who are universally and unconditionally ex-

emplary Catholics, yet the research studies over time do substantiate that Catholic schools have a significant positive effect on adult beliefs and behaviors.

The continued Catholic identity of Catholic schools is dependent upon the ability to define, foster, and encourage this "identity" through translation of traditional symbols into contemporary idiom and policy. There is a responsibility to create and support structures that assure these beliefs and values. Effective faculty professional and spiritual development is one such structure. It was in this context that the conference was planned and the themes developed in this book are brought forward.

You are invited to enter in and join Jim Heft, Thomas Groome, and Lars Lund as they explore the patterns and possibilities shaping the teaching of religion and campus ministry in the Catholic secondary school.

Mary Frances Taymans, SND, Ed.D.
Associate Executive Director, NCEA Secondary Schools Department

Notes

1. National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *To Teach as Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972:14.

2. McBride, Alfred. "Major challenges facing Catholic education in the 1980's." *Momentum* 13 (4): 9-11.

3. Greeley, Andrew. *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church*. Mission, KS: Sheed and Ward, 1976.

4. Guerra, Michael J., Donahue, M., & Benson, P. *The Heart of the Matter: Effects of Catholic High Schools on Student Values, Beliefs and Behavior*. Washington, D.C.: The National Catholic Educational Association, 1990.

5. Gorman, R.T. "Catholic identity: the future in light of the past." *Momentum*, 19 (3), 18-21.

Patterns and Possibilities: A Look at Catholic Identity

Rev. James Heft, SM, Ph.D.
The University of Dayton, Ohio

Fr. Heft offered a keynote address to NCEA's conference for high school religion teachers and department chairpersons, and campus ministers held at The University of Dayton. The following comments, though somewhat edited, highlight issues in teaching and ministry that relate particularly to today's high school students.

I want to focus in this presentation on what I consider to be good evidence for the importance of the Catholic high school. You may now be saying to yourself: "Well, I don't need to hear that. I already believe it." Yet, I want to provide you with some data provided by the social sciences that will buttress what may already be your actual experience.

Secondly, I'd like to talk about some patterns, patterns that have appeared in recent literature which deal with the so-called "Generation X." I've read about thirty articles on Generation X, and I have a few reflections I would like to share with you about that literature.

I want, then, to turn to what I consider to be some possibilities or goals that we really ought to be working hard to achieve. I think reaching these goals will bear fruit in the whole area of religious education and ministry. In one sense, none of what I express should be completely new to you because you may already be immersed in these realities; your experience is rich and deep. Yet, I may be able to describe these realities in ways that shed a little different light on them.

I will conclude with an observation from Jim DiGiacomo, who crystallizes some of what I will be presenting to you.

Introduction

By way of introduction, I would like to make three points. I would, firstly, like to remind you that teaching high school religion is relatively new in the Church because high schools are new. At the turn of the century a very small percentage of the population, about five percent, even attended high schools. In 1884 the Third Council of Baltimore decreed that within two years every parish should have a grade school, but by 1960 only about sixty percent of our parishes actually had grade schools and even fewer, much fewer, had high schools.

If you think of the history of the Church, it took us well over 400 years to hammer out a widely accepted understanding of Jesus, an absolutely central teaching of Christianity. Now, think about that. Teaching high school religion is a relatively new thing. It includes not just a single doctrine, but a whole range of doctrines, morality, history, and Scripture studies. It takes place in a setting where we compete with other courses mandated by the state, to say nothing of sports and television, for our students' attention, hearts, and minds. We have, of course, accumulated some insight into this process, but I am not so sure that we have accumulated enough insight to know how really to do this. Let's be patient. The turnover rate of high school religion teachers suggests that the task is very demanding and that there may be a certain lack of patience. I think we have to realize that we are all relative novices at this, not only as individuals, but as a Church.

Secondly, adolescents are unlike people at any other age. I have been very close and remain close to my family. I have been blessed to be close to a number of my nephews and nieces. My three sisters and brother are married and altogether have fourteen children. Several of them graduated from the University of Dayton and I could tell you some funny stories about them. One of my brothers-in-law once said about his daughter that at age 12 she somehow withdrew from the family and didn't "reappear" for about five years. Adolescents' emotions are frequently in a blender. People who teach even sixth graders and seventh graders know that. Adolescents can also be disarmingly open, edifyingly generous, painfully candid and, on occasion, even open to learning! The trick is to be right there with them at the right time.

My experience of teaching high school started after my junior year of college, when I was sent suddenly one Sunday afternoon to Cincinnati to Purcell High School to begin my teaching career the very next day. I was really sweating it because Monday morning I would be teaching seniors English composition. On the night before I left, I spoke to one of the old brothers in the community, a veteran teacher by the name of Brother

Wally Hausfeld, who'd had a tracheotomy and spoke in a very hoarse manner. I said to him, "Brother, I'm really worried. I'm due on deck tomorrow morning." He said, in his hoarse voice, "Don't worry, Jim. Prepare class for Wednesday." I said, "Wednesday? Brother, classes start tomorrow." He replied, "No, no, no. Mondays, the students, they're never really there. On Tuesdays they begin to wake up. On Wednesdays you got 'em. On Thursdays they're thinking of Fridays, and on Fridays . . . forget it!" Teaching adolescents is really a challenge. They've got to be there, you've got to be there, you've got to love them and work with them. Brother Wally, by the way, was a mechanical drawing teacher and he was marvelously talented and loved by the kids.

I have been very taken by a number of Ernest Boyer's books. He served as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He has published a book almost every three years, very thoughtful books. My third point regards a challenge he offers teachers in a book called *College: The Undergraduate Experience.* In it he states that too few faculty are sufficiently mindful "of an obligation to give students a sense of passage toward a more coherent view of knowledge and a more integrated life." After talking with quite a few students who are just a little bit older than the ones with whom you work day in and day out in high school, he writes, "These students long for a more coherent view of knowledge and, in quiet moments, wondered aloud whether getting a job and getting ahead would be sufficiently fulfilling." He then poses this question: "Why are the most deeply felt issues, the most haunting questions, the most creative moments, often relegated to the margins of the educational institution? When and where is time taken to explore life's ambiguities and imponderables? Are ethical and moral choices thoughtfully examined and convictions formed?"[1] Excellent questions, don't you think?

It is a great joy that those of us really involved in ministry, in teaching in a Catholic high school, can say unambiguously that we make a genuine effort to address the deeply felt issues and face the haunting questions of our students.

The Unique Contribution of the Catholic High School

Let me now turn to what I believe is the unique contribution of the Catholic high school. One of the most important studies to come out recently is *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* by Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee and Peter Holland published in 1993 by Harvard University Press. It's available and it's worth reading. After extensive studies, site visits to

seven Catholic high schools, extensive analysis of a large national database, exploration into social and intellectual history of Catholic schools, the study asks this question: How do Catholic high schools manage simultaneously to achieve relatively high levels of student learning, distribute this learning more equitably with regard to race and class than in the public sector, and sustain high levels of teacher commitment and student engagement?"[2]

The study dispels the common misconception that students in Catholic schools achieve because all Catholic schools can dismiss students who won't learn or are discipline problems. They also dispel the misconception that Catholic schools are elitist organizations for rich kids. When you take into consideration Catholic schools across the country, certainly the grade schools and with few exceptions our high schools, that is simply not true.

Four Foundational Characteristics

The study presents four foundational characteristics of Catholic high schools. The first is that in Catholic high schools there is typically a ***core curriculum*** for all the students. Part of that core curriculum is dictated by the particular state wherein the school is located, but it is also determined by the fact that most Catholic schools typically simply don't have the money to offer numerous electives. In Catholic schools there is less "tracking" than in public schools. That is, all students are expected to go through a similar program, one that prepares them for college.

Studies on good teaching demonstrate again and again that good teachers expect a good deal from their students. One gets what one genuinely and clearly expects to get. When one does not expect much, one doesn't get much either. A common core curriculum that prepares students for college expects a lot from all the students.

There seems to be a certain confidence about what is taught. Faculty in colleges go through protracted debates, sometimes unsuccessful ones, about what should constitute the core curriculum. A debate about what is worth teaching? High school faculty, for the most part, are spared this problem for there can be, especially in Catholic high schools, a clearer consensus on what is expected.

The second foundational characteristic of Catholic schools is their ***communal organization***. Catholic high schools are typically not as large as many public high schools. Moreover, in Catholic schools many events are celebrated by the entire student body: liturgies, prayer, the kind of beautiful expression of song and dance that we had before our session began. These things are not unusual in Catholic schools. Our schools

also pick up on themes that are significant and deep, that explore those issues to which Ernest Boyer referred. There is also typically in Catholic schools an extended role for teachers. We are allowed to talk about values; we are even paid to talk about religion.

I have a number of friends in public schools who are very hesitant to discuss ethics, not to mention religion in their classrooms. If such topics are raised by students, some of these teachers permit the discussions but are very careful not to take a personal position on any of the topics. In Catholic schools, teachers have an extended role. You may sometimes say, "Yeah, it's too extended. I've got too many extracurriculars, too many preparations, and the pay is not good." Nonetheless, the extended role for the teacher in the Catholic school legitimates teachers entering more intimately into the life of the student. Our schools, after all, have been established precisely to try to deal not only with the passing on of simple skills or useful knowledge, but also with how we are to live and what we are to believe. If we're not stepping up to that precious opportunity, then we are making a terrible mistake.

The third foundational characteristic in Catholic schools is their ***decentralized governance***. Principals are often selected from the faculty of the school. These people are principals, not "careerists" moving around and seeking promotions at a lot of different places. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a Catholic school system though generally, when many talk about Catholicism they seem to talk about it as a monolithic system. The truth is that Catholic schools are fairly autonomous places that practice site-based management principles. There's a lot of "ownership" locally. Pressure has been brought recently to bear on the public sector to adopt models that put more authority on the local level, rather than retain very large centralized bureaucracies to run school systems.

The fourth foundational characteristic is, in the authors' view, the most important. In most Catholic schools, one finds an ***inspirational ideology***. The three scholars who completed this study wanted their conclusion to have a scientific basis; they were hesitant, understandably so, to rely on "soft," qualitative data. They wanted to be able to demonstrate their conclusions, yet they realized that there was something happening in the schools which they examined that defied simple and precise empirical analysis. They also realized that this qualitative factor was absolutely vital to the transforming power of those institutions.

They started exploring inspirational "ideology;" it's not the word I would choose, but that's what they called it. In their discussion of inspirational "ideology" they underscore the importance of the explicit con-

tent of shared values. Do they claim that every faculty member in a high school must share the same position on all questions? Who's kidding whom? Nevertheless, the spectrum of possible differences needs to be less than at a public school. Those values which should be put at the center are identifiable. Building a strong community in the school is the goal most repeated by high school principals.

Some students mistakenly think that, if they had first-rate teachers, excellent course content, good methodologies used by teachers, and excellent facilities, the school would be great. Nonetheless, a school that has these elements but is without a strong sense of community based on a vision as to what the school ought to be; a vision which has to do with more than trying to get people ready to take the next step to a good college and enter a lucrative career upon graduation; a vision that is truly based on the Gospel; then that inspirational ideology is not there. This type of vision must be central to the mission of a Catholic school community.

I think that the authors come up with a very powerful sense of the consequences of that Gospel vision. To the extent that the leadership of a school has internalized that vision or that the vision really is at the heart of things, then that school is really powered by all eight cylinders, or four, or whatever is ecologically friendly.

I said the vision needs to be internalized; it also needs to be articulated. This point can best be illustrated by an example that I think translates well to your work with adolescents. We had an incident here on campus a couple of years ago when some students were pressing, in the name of realism, that we administrators wake up and get our heads out of the sand. We were informed that some students in the residence halls were having sex and that, therefore, in this day and age when there's *fatally* transmittable diseases, the administration should locate condom dispensers in the residence halls. So, Brother Ray, the University's president said to me, "You're second in command, you answer these people."

We had one lower-level administrator at the University who offered no more by way of a response than, "We don't do this because we are a Catholic university." That's the right conclusion and that's the right reason for that conclusion, but perhaps not the best way to articulate the purpose of the University as Catholic in this sort of situation. It would have been better, in my view, to have responded with something along these lines:

> If people want to get condoms, there's no way we will be able to stop them. If people decide to have sex, they can walk ten minutes down the street and buy condoms at any number of stores on Brown

Street.

However, we believe that sexual relations outside of a deep commitment are not smart. Sexual relations apart from a commitment often cause great disappointment in peoples' lives. Casual sex, uncommitted sex, messes up and confuses people, often distracting them from their studies. Many people who get involved in this way are also people who are not doing that well in their studies. We don't think it's a wise thing educationally; we also don't think it's wise morally. Our religious tradition requires maturity, life-long dedication and exclusivity for sexual relations to be good. As a consequence, we will not set up condom dispensaries to facilitate fornication.

I believe that when the inspirational vision is more internalized, a thoughtful articulation of it can be much more cogent and persuasive. When people only say that we do such and such because we're Catholic, it doesn't help very much in such situations. All of you know that. You've worked with young people and adults. You've got to wrestle with trying to articulate the vision effectively.

To offer another view on this issue, I came across one other bit of evidence that supports the value of Catholic high schools. An article in the October, 1994 issue of *America* described a conclusion from a study completed by the Educational Testing Service, the famous SAT producer, founded in 1947 and now residing on a 340-acre campus in Princeton, New Jersey. ETS had completed a lengthy study in 1994 entitled *The Image of Ministry: Attitudes of Young Adults Toward Organized Religion and Religious Professions.* It is a really fascinating study and includes Protestants, Jews, Catholics, young people, and so forth. I cite only one little paragraph that was in *America*: "Perhaps the most consequential of the findings...is that among major denominations the Catholic Church ranks next to last in its impact on members who attend public high schools. (The Disciples of Christ are last.)"[3] They never explain why that's the case. What this suggests about the importance of maintaining Catholic high schools does not need underlining.

On reflection, though, I think it does need underlining; doubts still exist about the value of Catholic schools. Speaking from our experience here at the University, I have seen students come from public high schools who have a deep religious faith, just as there are students who come from Catholic high schools who, for one reason or another, somehow have gotten so disgruntled about the Church that it takes a long time to get them to be open to their Faith. Yet, by and large the evidence seems to be very clear that a solid Catholic high school experience has a lasting positive impact.

We know that this is often not only the impact of the Catholic high school. It usually includes and actually requires faith-filled families who will make that extra sacrifice to ensure that their children can attend our schools. There is much more that could be shared on this topic.

PATTERNS

What are some of the patterns emerging about teaching the young people today? Who are the people we are teaching? Is it Generation X? Strictly speaking, Generation Xers are in their 20-somethings and we are concerned with the teenagers. One of the conclusions I reached while reading the literature about Generation Xers was that it was not that helpful in leading me to deeper insight. Yet, a few of my conclusions apply to adolescents, and I would like to share these with you.

Portrayals of Generation X in the Literature

Portrayals of Generation X frequently make contradictory assertions. Look at a recent *Harper*'s article, called "The Packaging (and Re-packaging) of a Generation;"[4] it underscores many of these contradictions. Secondly, we really need to focus, in my opinion, on more particular groups, similar to the ETS study cited previously. Literature on Generation X would be more helpful if it focused on those members of the group that attended Catholic schools. None of the literature I read had that important focus. Most of these articles ignore larger cultural and economic contexts. One of the things that I found very interesting in this literature was that a supposedly big shift in the description of the generations took place around 1990. What happened around 1990? A big recession. Times of economic crisis seem to be an impetus for journalists to create new stories. The Oklahoma City bombing of the federal building was followed immediately, for example, by media articles and editorials about militias and neo-Nazis who are depicted as newly on the scene in the United States. Variations of these groups who take the law into their own hands have been with us for decades. It is when they become a media event that they seem to have only now popped up.

Christianity Today

Even seemingly factual descriptions of Generation X need to be carefully verified. According to an article in *Christianity Today* our students are:

- the children of divorce,
- from broken homes,

- children of two job families, and
- the first generation to grow up in a post-Christian America.[5]

Is this true of most or only part of our students? It depends, doesn't it, on where your school is located and what kind of students populate it. Almost all the articles on Generation X are written in typically clever ways with an undeserved air of authority. If you are not careful, just the cleverness of the prose and tone of the piece can lull you into agreement. These articles frequently tell us more about the people writing them than they tell us about the generation of young people with whom we work.

What advice do these articles offer to those who want to reach this generation? Advice that you've already been acting on, I'm sure, with real success, but listen to what they say about what you should be doing. Take, as an example, this article from *Christianity Today*. The author argues that if you want to reach young people today, you have to remember that they are impressed with ***authenticity***. Well, I ask, when we were high school students, did we like phonies? The article explains that young people today have been burned by so many broken promises and they are not into fads. Who would ever want to describe themselves as into fads? Authenticity is surely important, but the way the article is written gives one the impression that many of us who are 40-something were, when we were younger, okay with religious figureheads who were phony. I think I had a nose for the real thing when I was 17. How about you?

The author also asserts that young people today are searching for ***community***. Some of you may know a current rock group that does a song on this theme. It's a song about being homesick. It describes dysfunctional families and uses all the language of the day. The author of the article claims that young people today need Christianity lived out in community. They say that's why meditative prayer and quiet times are not very popular with young people so don't try them. I'm not so sure. Tell that, by the way, to the monks of Taizé who have had a tremendous impact on thousands of young people today by inviting them to sing chant and enter prolonged periods of silent prayer.

The author writes that young people don't respond to ***dogmatism***. "Experience trumps dogma" for young people.[6] "Rules do not have the weight they once did."[7] The author never defines dogma for his readers, and there is a very important distinction. Dogma is a wonderful reality, one of the few things that keeps us from caving into culture. Although we might find it at times to be a bit of an irritant, we need to rightly

understand dogma. Dogma does not explain a mystery, it affirms and preserves a mystery. Here is a simple example: Jesus is truly human and truly divine and not schizophrenic. Okay? He's one, but he's both human and divine. How can that be? If you know something about the history of the Christological heresies, what has typically happened? Some people come down on one side and favor the humanity; others on the other side favor the divinity. Or they might, if they're really creative, end up opting for schizophrenia, a Jesus who is sometimes human ("My God, why have you forsaken me?") and at other times divine ("The Father and I are one"). The real challenge is, first of all, to know what "divinity" is; can anyone here define divinity? What really would we be talking about? This is deep stuff. Divinity, humanity, both natures yet one person. I don't fully understand that. In saying this I don't want to support the common attitudes of some Christians who say, "Well, that's a mystery and I'll never understand, so I'll just accept it." Instead we should use our absolute best wits to keep trying to grapple with what this might mean. That's very important.

Additional advice from the author is on how to relate to Generation X: "Focus on the arts."[8] What he really means in the article is focus on music. I think there's much to be said about this. I think this generation is deeply connected to music, as much as many of us when we were younger. Young people now have, however, many more things to facilitate their link in music electronically; they have CDs, walkmans, all kinds of stuff that allows them to immerse themselves in the audio world. As kids we had a hi-fidelity record player in the living room and my father and mother had first dibs on it. Young people can now simply tune out by themselves with their walkman. Have any of you had the experience of teaching some students who nod and smile at what you're saying, but you then discover that they aren't hearing you at all; rather are listening to some music?

What about ***diversity***, the author's final bit of advice? A great amount of diversity exists in some, not all, of our schools. Whether it is welcomed or understood, are other questions. One of the issues we need to address is how we may preserve our religious identity if we really support diversity. What kind of diversity are we talking about? Do we want to include racists and sexists? I don't want to include them or, at least, I want to *convert* them. We don't want diversity simply for the sake of diversity. We seek, rather, a diversity within a common mission. If we don't have a strong common mission and welcome people with all their diversities into that mission, it isn't long before the mission disappears.

This article ends by offering a description of Jesus relevant to Genera-

tion X. The author says we've got to present something with which young people can identify, so he puts it this way:

> Jesus was in his early thirties when he began his public work; he had no career path and no place he could call home. His greatest battles were against the dogmas of his day, and he showed little faith in institutions and rules and regulations. Rather, his message was of a Father full of grace, and the context of his work was his personal relationships. He built the community, first with a small group of 12, and then across class, gender, racial, and lifestyle lines. He liked a good party, even turning water into wine to keep one from ending prematurely. He spoke against injustice and did not have the stomach for inauthentic people. He thought globally but acted locally.[9]

This portrait registers right near the top of my list as an example of changing the Gospel into something that fits my age but does not remain sufficiently faithful to the Gospel portrayal of Jesus. This "relevant" portrait doesn't call me to conversion.

America

The second article comes from *America* magazine, "Baby Boomers and the Transmission of Faith." I don't see a lot of difference here between what is asserted of Generation X and what could be just as well asserted by the baby boomers. This writer places "emphasis on spirituality rather than dogma and moralism," which is a common recommendation today. He offers, "Experience rather than creed....For most people silence is empty, cold and repressive; [These young people] prefer loud sounds, handshaking and conversation. . . . Emphasis on adult rather than child religion." He tells us that religious instruction is largely wasted on young people because they don't yet have the questions. We pour out all this information and they say, "So what? It's not relevant." He then tells us that we should place an "emphasis on adult rather than child pedagogies." "Adult" pedagogy to this author recognizes that learning is a dialogue, a give and take.[10]

I remember vividly reading once that universities are "where the Church does its thinking." Don't you think that's rather self-congratulatory on the part of university people to act as though you people in high school, chanceries, parishes, families, or religious orders don't do any thinking? There's a lot of thinking, and a lot of different kinds of thinking in a lot of different places. All of this thinking, when it's faithful and honest, contributes to the life of the Church.

I remember that some of the most penetrating questions that have

ever been asked me were from high school students. It's necessary really to think *with* them and to think critically. Most high school students are exposed to so much; it's not that they're more mature, but they're more exposed. It appears to take them a longer time to put things together, and that presents a tough challenge to educators. We need to be careful about assuming that high school students don't have much experience or that they don't think critically. I think students do; they may not think, however, in a very informed way. That's one of our roles as teachers.

Many of you have read the articles of Bill O'Malley, a Jesuit, in *America* magazine. You may remember eight years ago he wrote a wonderful article entitled, "P.T. Barnum and the Catechetical Quest: Ten Commandments for Religious Educators." He advises that "presumed disinterest be structured, clear and concrete. You've got to know the territory; have some understanding of where [adolescents are] coming from. Teach them to think." Challenge them with content. "Be flinty and vulnerable." By flinty, I think he meant sharp, direct, but also open and vulnerable, a very difficult but valuable combination. "Convince them that suffering is inescapable."[11]

I spent eight extraordinary days in Russia in June, 1995. I had never been to Russia before and, while there, I spent a lot of time talking to many different people. During one conversation with a Russian history teacher, we discussed the Oklahoma City bombing, which had just happened, and I was describing its extensive coverage by CNN. He said to me that "it seems like you people are not very used to tragedy. We have these things frequently." It's not that suffering's not bad, it's bad all right. Yet, unlike the Russian people, who accept it as a given part of life, we have to convince our students that suffering is inescapable.

"Give them concrete ways to serve." This is very important and I'll come back to that. "Don't turn out half-wits." Left brain gathers the data, right brain puts the pieces back together. As teachers we have got to bring them both together, both head and heart. "Conduct periodic audience polls." This is also very important. Find out what they're thinking and feeling, even if they just write a few lines. Introverts will write while the extroverts talk. Finally, and most importantly, Fr. O'Malley advises, "Love them."

Now, I have only one problem with Bill O'Malley's advice. If any of you have heard him speak, it is obvious that he is very talented and very bright. When he offers us this advice, these ten commandments, I think they are great for someone with his level of skill. Many of us, after reading such advice, might say to ourselves: "That's great for you, you're

gifted; but what do I do? I'm an ordinary person who is well disposed and has some background information, but I just wonder sometimes if I can cut it." We don't have to be great to do a very good and credible job in the classroom.

Possibilities

I want now to turn my attention to a number of possibilities for Catholic high schools that I have come over the years to see as very important.

Classroom Religion Teaching and Campus Ministry

Make sure that the campus ministry program and the classroom teaching programs are integrated, not just on parallel tracks, or worse yet, at cross purposes. One way to ensure this is to never have anyone who is a full-time campus minister. I would like all religion teachers and campus ministers to somehow function on, if you will, both sides of the aisle, in the ministry dimension as well as in the teaching dimension. I think it's a demanding but wise combination. There are different views on this position that are worth discussing.

I want to talk about the challenge and the privilege of teaching religion. I find, sometimes, a strange dichotomy between campus ministers and religion teachers, especially if they are full time either way. The dichotomy appears along these lines: the campus ministers are the people who really deal with the experience of the young people and the teachers are lecturing about these concepts in the classroom. There really has to be a closer collaboration between these two groups, because when that collaboration is present, they have a much more powerful impact on the school community.

Integrating Religious Studies and Other Academic Areas

Make sure that the religious inspiration of the school, most clearly expressed in religion classes and through the work of campus ministry, is reflected in the rest of the curriculum. This cannot be affected only by religion teachers and campus ministers. It is affected by principals who have a vision of what a Catholic school should be. It is affected by every member of the school community. A very good "public" school plus religion classes does not make a Catholic high school.

Most people who go into their classrooms don't know what other teachers do in their classrooms. What would happen if, in fact, at least one day of every school year was set aside for teachers of different disciplines to talk with each other about what they teach? Too typically the

people who *really* control schools are secretaries and coaches, because they stay at a school longer than any of the principals, and, sometimes, the science teachers, because they teach the "real thing," i.e., marketable knowledge. The others, especially the religion teachers, are viewed as teaching the "soft stuff!" Such situations ought to be challenged and principals, in particular, need to gather all of their teachers together. Remember, principals play a key role in creating that distinctive atmosphere for a Catholic high school.

Learning and Service

More and more of our students at the University of Dayton are doing service. What we don't always do well here or in high schools is to find ways to get the service and the classroom learning linked. Some of our students take a rather radical approach to life, radical in a good sense, and begin to develop a nose for inconsistencies and, of course, it's not hard to find them because they're there. What happens, though, is that they develop a high-scale critique that is coupled with a low-scale appreciation for ambiguity and ambivalence, and many don't yet have a very deep spirituality that can cope with such ambiguities. As a consequence, there is a tremendous need to somehow bridge the gap between their high ideals and the daily ambiguities. Without this bridge you find very committed prophets who challenge these inconsistencies but then get burned out and end up selling insurance by the time they're 28. We need to find a way to insure that the deeper some young people criticize, the even more deeply will they commit themselves to a Gospel of love and forgiveness.

Rosemary Haughton, an extraordinary woman, mother of ten children, and author of over 30 books, gave an address a few years ago at the University of Dayton. That address embodied one of the most carefully balanced combinations of searing criticism of the Church, i.e., *us*, not just the bishops but all of us, and of a wonderful and deep love of the Church. To have that balance requires some depth and personal commitment. It's one thing to suffer *for* the Church, it's another to suffer *from* it, and still another for us to cause suffering of others in the Church. There are many challenges in this area. One may include combining learning and service.

If learning and service were *alone* done well, it would radically change the way we do education. Some of you may have heard this wonderful Chinese saying: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." It is just simply a fact that when you act an idea out with your hands and the rest of your body, the idea sticks more in your mind afterwards.

One of the great problems we have in most of our educational systems is that they are so cerebral, and I say that as a fairly cerebral German myself. We need to learn to better link service and learning. If it takes too much time or if there are too few staff, it is still possible to do for some students. This combination of learning and service can have a tremendous impact on them. Once they serve, we must ask them, "What did it mean? Let's talk about it." We help them make the important connection between the gospel and the good service they've done. I like to think of it as the three H's: head, heart, and hands.

Dogma and Life

Another rich possibility is the combination of dogma and life. Typically today in religious education literature, you find people who write "dogma, dogma, dogma—what boring stuff. The Church is just a bunch of aging male celibate clerics who spend a lot of time arguing about things that are not important." I beg to differ, at least about the matter of dogma. One of the things I'd love to do, if I ever get the time, is to write a little book on the Apostles Creed. I'd like to do it with three columns on each page: 1) the statement of faith, 2) the historical context, and 3) the contemporary relevance. I'd do this for every one of the statements in the Creed because each has great contemporary relevance. Creeds are extremely significant because they stand there as important articulations; they are permanent, foundational, and hold us together internationally century after century. One of the great difficulties for churches that are located in only one country is that it is very hard for them to resist that culture and, if you are part of an international church, there are more tensions. Are we going to have an American-Catholic Church, are we going to be Europeanized, or are we going to stay at the Eucharistic table and continue to talk to each other, celebrating some of the differences and still sustain a deep commonality?

Spirituality and Tradition

Today, many people who run bookstores tell us that religion is alive and well in the United States. I think that's true of a certain type of highly individualistic spirituality. There are now many books that talk about personal spirituality and even inner visions and seeing the light and so on. The notion of religion in these books, as contrasted with spirituality, is almost always, however, equated with something organized, which is equated with something that's bureaucratic, which is equated with boring, which is equated with "who needs it?"

I think one of the things we need to do, and that we owe to our young

people, is to help them see that spirituality that is untethered, that is unconnected with the tradition of Scripture and the ritual of sacramental life becomes so amorphous that eventually it dissolves into little more than personal self-realization. One of the possibilities on which I think our religious education and ministry ought to focus is constantly making rich and creative connections between spirituality and religious tradition. Yes, pay close attention to experience, but experience is a very subtle and malleable kind of thing. If we absolutize our own experience, if we distance ourselves from others by saying, "Well, that's not my experience," we then run the risk of becoming even more solipsistic than we already tend to be. Let us think instead about our experience in the larger, richer and deeper context of our religious traditions. This is, admittedly, a very difficult thing to do in our culture because we are in trouble if we absolutize our personal experiences *or* simply ignore them.

Don't you deal with this all the time? This is deep in our culture whether we are a baby boomer or not, whether we are a member of Generation X or not. Do we often polarize what we shouldn't, as when we ask, "Do you obey the law or do you follow your conscience?" This is a false either/or; of course, I have to make up my own mind. Nobody should ever make up your mind for you. The only real question is what do you need to think about before you make your own decision? Let's broaden the scope of what's important to think about, certainly broaden it beyond your own immediate experience, which you, nonetheless, should not ignore.

Great Commandment or Great Commission

We must finally link the Great Commandment and the great commission. Young people today are pretty big on the Great Commandment: love your neighbor as yourself, especially when they're loving you, yet, where is the great commission to go forth and witness, which should follow the commandment? We're not so sure about that. Stephen Carter, Yale University law professor, wrote in his influential 1993 book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, the following:

> To be devoutly religious, after all is to believe in some aspect of the supernatural, whether the belief involves a certainty that God parted the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape, a conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God...or a sense that a powerful sentience beyond human ken is prepared, for whatever reason, to intervene in human affairs.... The message of contemporary culture seems to be that it is perfectly all right to believe that stuff...but you really ought to keep it to yourself...."[12]

Since the mid-seventies, particularly with a marvelous letter that came from Pope Paul VI, there's been an emphasis within the Catholic Church on evangelization. Most Catholics are embarrassed by it and don't know what to do with this emphasis. They associate it with protestants, and especially with Christian fundamentalists. I concur that evangelization is a good idea. We need to find ways to speak authentically about Jesus to others instead of thinking that evangelization is some type of boorish behavior that is rude, or at least inappropriate, something that is bound to present God as a killjoy bent upon stopping people from having fun.

I am guilty every once in a while of surfing TV channels with the channel changer. I plopped down recently and started scanning channels. I don't watch much television, and when I happened upon "Party of Five," I paused. There was a scene with two young people, in bed, talking to each other. I didn't flip from this immediately and said to myself, "Well now, let's see what this is." The young woman really wants to have sex. The conversation reveals that she is about to leave town and will not see this guy again. The guy's body language appears to be saying, "I don't really think this is a good idea." He doesn't say because Jesus condemned this. He says, "You know, this doesn't make a lot of sense for us because we're really not ready for a life commitment." I was amazed! The way it was scripted and acted seemed authentic on the guy's part. They just went to sleep. Now, ultimately in that kind of situation, I doubt that such thinking usually prevails, but that was what was acted out in this scene. I was stunned. I called some of the other brothers to come watch this!

What I am saying is that witnessing the faith and doing it well, and in public, is a lost art. That's the great commission. We generally want to build communities that provide a lot of personal support, but not many that have as an essential part going forth and witnessing, which is much harder. Yet, we need to do that a lot more than we do.

The Relationship Between Gospel and Culture

Finally, I want to say something about the relationship between gospel and culture. John Paul II has talked about this a great deal, giving it special emphasis; he is not, however, the first pope to have done this. I think there are two very rich dimensions to this theme upon which I will elaborate.

Positive and Negative Dimensions of Culture

To state the obvious, there are both positive and negative dimensions

to culture. What's more, the Gospel is never "unincultured." Gospel and culture constitute a complex reality. When I think of American culture, I think of several fairly positive things. One is *personal freedom*, though we also have hyper-individualism in our culture. We make a god out of choice, but nonetheless, we enjoy personal freedom. Go to Russia today and you'll find people that have not known political or religious freedom for decades, even before communism lived in a non-democratic culture. They are now struggling to find some way to live life together and exercise some type of internalized restraints when previously they had so many external constraints.

Do you know where the word "busha" comes from? It's a Russian word for grandmother; I never knew that until I visited there two summers ago. I noticed in Yaroslavl that many of the women who were 50 or 60 years old were typically kind of frumpy, round-faced, wore a subdued print dress, and had a babushka wrapped around their heads. Yet, the young women on the campus, to a person, were dressed to kill and wore makeup like Madonna, the pop culture icon of the West. I was trying to figure out how these two generations came together. Have these young women been mesmerized by the tinsel of the West? Perhaps. As I said, there are positive things in our culture, like freedom, but there are also negative things, like *consumerism*.

Another positive element in our culture is the belief and practice of *access to all levels of education*. It is very hard, even to this day, to get into a number of schools of higher learning in Europe. Although Europeans have in recent years moved much more to our American model of universal access to education, this is true. In our country we have all kinds of possibilities from community colleges to technical institutes to research universities, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive universities. We have so many choices, and not just in higher education. Some students from other countries are amazed to find in our stores not just milk, but 2%, 4%, and skim milk. Yes, we have many choices, perhaps too many, and certainly an abundance of trivial ones in our affluent country.

Due process is yet another positive characteristic of American culture, although in my opinion Rome has yet to learn enough about it. I say this with all due respect. There are things that Rome is much better at than we are. Due process has, however, grown out of British Common Law and has shaped our legal tradition, offering legal protection that I believe we need to use more in cases of dispute within the Church. In time, I am sure this will come to pass.

As I mentioned, there are also negative dimensions of American culture, such as consumerism. As a consequence, religion teachers and

campus ministers are constantly going to be in a process of discerning what is good and what is bad. Such discernment was captured really well for me by an old pro, Jim DiGiacomo, in an address given at a high school graduation and printed in *America*. I think you will see why I have selected it to illustrate why it is necessary for the Gospel to confront our culture. Speaking to the graduates, he said, with a certain irony:

> Some of the...things you may have picked up range from the useless to the dangerous. Some well meaning teachers have probably tried to infect you with some of their own idealism. In one way or another, they have all tried to develop in you a moral sense that values such qualities as honesty, generosity, and even sexual responsibility. Some have attempted to distract you with talk of social consciousness and have even tried to make you feel not only sorry for those less fortunate but even obliged to try to help them. You probably still have some of their slogans rattling around in your heads—like '[being people] for others,' 'for God's greater glory,' and 'the following of Christ.' In your religion classes and liturgies and retreats, they have tempted you to look for some larger meaning of life, to dabble in questions of ultimate concern, to question whether there is more to life than earning, spending, accumulating, and consuming.... Surely some of you tried to do that, that subversive kind of stuff. [He continues] There is only one sure way to insulate yourself against all this fuzzy idealism—Remember the goal. Remember why you came to high school in the first place, and why you're going to college in the next place. What's the bottom line? The bottom line, my friends, is how much do you make a year? How much do you own? How good is your credit? Next year, and the year after, how much more will you be making and how much more will you own? Remember what the Cadillac ad said: 'you are what you drive.' Don't forget the most basic doctrine of our national religion: Happiness can be bought. Money buys products and products can fulfill us and satisfy our deepest human needs....[13]

My friends, that's the kind of challenge that we face in our culture. When we are really doing our job well, we not only entertain and instruct, we also aggravate and challenge. We become voices that challenge, which I believe is very, very important for us to do. It's a tough road we are to follow and a real challenge for us to teach that way. That is why I think Bill O'Malley said about our students that, in the last analysis, "You gotta love 'em."

The Greatest of All Professions: Teaching

That is what I say to all of you: teaching is the greatest of all profes-

sions, even though it may not be the oldest. Something becomes clearer in college than in high school: namely, a lot of cultural prestige goes with certain majors in college, prestige directly correlated with the earning power of that degree upon graduation. If you look at professions like medicine or law and consider the compensation of these professions compared to that given to high school teachers, you realize among other things that high school teachers and campus ministers are not in it for the money. Some use this argument to deduce why we shouldn't raise the salaries because then only those who love the job take it. I do not support that argument. My philosophy is that we should pay competitively, but then expect *everything* including, not just a commitment of time and expertise, but a commitment of the heart to the inspirational vision of the school.

I want to say to you that teaching is an extraordinary profession. I could be flippant and say, "Where will someone get paid to talk for nine months?" On the other hand, as we have seen, we are called to do much more. You are called really to engage the young people before you and entrusted to you, and to try with respect and love to realize those possibilities I have raised by overcoming the ways in which ideas and realities are so typically split apart and polarized by our culture. We must try to bring them back together integrate individual actions with what is done in the school as a whole. As a whole, the school has a very real impact and affects all that we try to do in our role within it.

Question/Answer Session

Speaker 1: Please elaborate on the difference between dogma and dogmatism.

Rev. Heft: Dogmatism assumes an authoritarian style; it never learns because it always has the answer, even before the question is asked. Insecure people hide behind dogmatism.

On the other hand, dogma is the ever and always inadequate effort to articulate that which is ultimately beyond articulation. In order to preserve revealed truth from being caricatured, over-simplified or twisted, dogma keeps us more focused on that which has been given to us as a great gift, namely, revelation.

Some of you may know a clever definition of heresy. Heresy is a truth that's gone mad because of loneliness. Saying this suggests that, although a heresy often gets something right, it generally leaves out other important dimensions of revealed truth.

One can affirm a dogma *and* still have many questions about a par-

ticular dogma's meaning and even relevance. One may say, "I believe this, but I'm not sure what it means." Some readers might think this statement is ridiculous. A student asked me once, "How can you affirm something, commit to something, that you don't fully understand?" I responded, "Try marriage." When you have a dogma, or more accurately, when it has you, you stand before it in reverence because you realize that it points to the mystery of God.

One of the big problems today is that too many students have not had the opportunity to experience the teachers who help them appreciate the nature and limits of dogmatic statements. I was very blessed with teachers in the history of theology who helped me understand the context out of which various dogmatic formulations arose. Lacking context is like hearing the tail end of a conversation and then trying to understand the entire conversation, which you did not hear. As a consequence, a person in that situation is bound to misunderstand the conversation. If you received, however, the historical training, coupled with a deep faith, you would realize that no dogma is perfectly formulated, and many will need reformulation. In fact, certain truths of the Faith need to find new formulations to remain accurate. This sounds like heresy, but it is not. The effort to reformulate a dogma must not tend to dissolve it nor to relativize it; it is, rather, to restate it in a less inadequate way for our own age. All Christian dogma points ultimately to the heart of revelation, the Word, the person of Jesus in whom we are to live and move and have our very being.

In summary, dogmatism is that unlistening, authoritarian manner; dogma is that ever rich and engaging formulation that points to saving truth, Jesus Christ.

Speaker 2: Please comment on parental choice, and particularly families who choose Catholic schools and a Catholic education but wish the religious education part was not included in the package.

Rev. Heft: My experience is, in general, that these people, especially people in the inner city who sacrifice to send their children to our schools, love the religious education though they are not Catholic. If, in affluent suburbs, our teaching of religion raises difficult social issues, we can make people there much more uneasy than we might in the inner city.

One of the problems in dealing with some young people is to challenge what tends to be a natural anti-establishment attitude, even though it seems that many young people today vote conservatively without even thinking. One of our responsibilities as educators is to find more of a balance here. I like the melody of the contemporary liturgical song,

"Voices that Challenge," but in the verses of that song most of the voices that challenge come from the politically liberal side of the house. The song does not include the voices that oppose sexual promiscuity, abortion, or the exploitation of both men and women by some corporations. Neither do the voices represent some of the challenges provided by other papal teachings. The selection of voices made by the songwriter appear one-sided.

Let's be more careful and find more effective ways to present the social teachings of the Church. The social teachings are bound to be unpopular with most of us because they are prophetic. What prophet was ever popular and widely published or well received? The social teachings address some aspects of the way we live. In the United States where we have a separation of church and state, religion has become privatized. In such a setting religion is relegated to providing people with inner strength, helping people be personally nice, and professionally very successful. Yet, if you begin to teach your students to take on that culture and critically challenge dimensions of it, parents often get nervous and, sometimes, even students get nervous, especially when they grasp the depth of what is being asked of them and their lives. You can't force prophecy, but you can invite people to a prophetic life.

These issues provide a wonderful teaching opportunity; a challenge not to water things down but to experience profound moments of realization in conversation with the students. For those people who don't want a religion class, I have to ask them why. If their reason is because the classes are really poorly taught, boring and unchallenging, then I agree with them. If the reasons, however, include raising issues that make the gospel challenging, even at home, I stand firm. Unfortunately, it is usually not that simple. Underneath all these questions lies the issue of discernment, trying to find a balance back and forth, with the prophetic, with the basic teachings and acquiring attitudes of humility, prayer, candor, and honesty. Educators are in the trenches and can figure out how to do this better than I.

Speaker 3: Please talk a little bit more about spirituality and our cultural biases.

Rev. Heft: Let me give you two examples. First, for six years I chaired the Religious Studies Department here at the University. One of the things I noticed, especially for people applying to our master's program, was that many of them had been studying and attending workshops on their own. The application asks them to list what they have studied they would invariably list much on spirituality and even Scripture, but almost

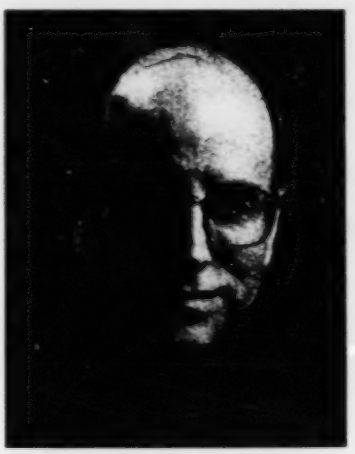
never would it include the history of Christianity or doctrine.

Around 1925, I believe, Pope Pius XI required the Cistercians to teach more dogma and history to complement their studies in spirituality. In order to maintain balance and sustain a solid Christian vision, there must be a larger context, a framework. To study only spirituality, which often is equated today with one's personal experience, removes a person from a larger, richer, and deeper tradition of wisdom that provides insight far beyond what an individual may find by looking only within.

I don't want to say that a person should not trust experience; we've often discounted it too much in the past. On the other hand, as our students enter into any experience, we must make sure their horizons are broader than an individual's consciousness. A broader horizon comes from being part of a tradition which is much bigger and much richer than our immediate impressions.

Second, our culture in general tends by its nature to be anti-institutional. Our culture assumes that authority and organization are simply inimical to spontaneity and to life. Anybody who knows anything about sports realizes that practice, discipline and organization are precisely the attributes which encourage extraordinary freedom, extraordinary grace. There needs to be a structure and discipline to have freedom. If these are absent, freedom almost always collapses on itself.

Father James Heft, SM, currently serves as the chancellor of The University of Dayton, acting as the University's second ranking administrator and chief academic officer. Both reflective and practical, he accomplishes well the goals of his position in the sense that he is simultaneously an administrator and a scholar. In the course of his professional life he has taught, worked in campus ministry, and written a number of essays. He has authored a major book and another in the works on Catholic identity of higher education. He spoke most recently at the 1996 NCEA Convention on Catholic identity issues.



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Conversation as a Mode of Faith Education

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This presentation, given June 23, 1995 at the University of Dayton, at a conference for high school religion teachers and campus ministers was sponsored by NCEA's Departments of Secondary Schools and Religious Education.

In this presentation my focus is on *faith education* and *conversation* as a mode thereof, but my reflections will invite you to interchange the word *faith* with the word *spirituality*. Interchange them or understand them as synonymous. The reason for this suggestion is to invite you to consider that *spirituality* is, in fact, your ultimate concern and intent for your students. When you teach Christian faith, you really intend to nurture their spirituality, to shape their whole *being*.

I'm only now coming to realize this myself. My own work over the years, especially my whole proposal of *sharing faith* as a mode of religious education, is, in fact, a spirituality approach to religious education. By this I mean a way of doing religious education that seems more likely, with the help of God's grace, to lead people beyond knowledge of their faith to a wisdom for life that shapes their whole being, their identity, and how they live in the world. Teaching wisdom in faith, which goes beyond knowledge but without leaving it behind, is really a concern for the holiness of life, for people's spirituality.

I will wager that when you reflect on your own teaching or ministry, and the grand reason why you do it, you will discern something similar. As campus ministers and religion teachers you intend more for your students than what Western culture typically means by *knowledge*. Be-

yond people knowing about Jesus, you want them to become disciples of Jesus. Beyond them knowing about justice, you want them to become just and live justly. Beyond them knowing about prayer, you want them to become prayers. You intend to get into the very depths of people's lives and to shape how they live them in Christian faith from the very core of themselves.

I propose that, in fact, you are really *after people's souls*. That's an old phrase that we haven't used much lately, but I'm for going back to it. *Soul* helps to say what our goal really is. This generation of religious educators has a newfound conviction that we cannot settle for people's heads alone, that we want to educate their hearts and hands as well. When you try to gather up the three together, the only term I know from Christian tradition that comes close to carrying as much meaning is *soul*. The scripture scholars tell us that this is how Jesus used the word in his preaching of the Great Commandment. Remember he says "love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, strength," and then adds, "with all your soul," as if to summarize all three—head, heart, and hands.

When you *go after people's souls*, then you are knee-deep in people's own spirits and in the work of the Holy Spirit. Your job and mine, at their best, are about spirituality. In this, of course, we are not the primary agents; as Aquinas put it, we are *cooperators*, partners, in this awesome work. Precisely because this is not something that we can do *to* them, but rather must do *with* them, this should shunt us toward a teaching or ministering style of *conversation*. How do you respond to my proposal thus far?

Speaker 1: I like it, but can it be done without loosing academic integrity, without watering down what we are supposed to do in the classroom.

Dr. Groome: Ah! A fine caution and a perennial question throughout the history of the Church: Can the university and the monastery, the academic and the spiritual, be held together? We'll see—I'll check with you at the end of the morning—to see what you think.

Speaker 2: Doesn't a lot depend on what you mean by spirituality. For many people this is something for church or only about saying prayers.

Dr. Groome: Yes, a common stereotype is that our prayer is our spirituality but, in fact, our life is our spirituality and our spirituality is the *God-consciousness* we bring to living our lives. Our prayer is simply a way to nurture that God-consciousness.

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It will help, perhaps, if we put into a brief historical perspective this challenge of how to educate for spiritual growth without loosing scholarly and academic rigor, in a sense, how to put spirituality and theology back together again. None of us want to go back to the caricatures of the '60s from which we are only now recovering. My suggestion of *conversation* could be heard that way ("what ya wanna talk about today"), and I appreciate and share this concern. In my own teaching of undergraduates at Boston College, academic integrity is imperative, if for no other reason than that their theology grade will be as much a part of their cumulative grade as any other. Yet, I think I have found ways to teach that are challenging and demanding from a scholarly perspective, and also seem more likely to encourage spiritual nurture as well. In fact, this reflects an old Catholic conviction that scholarship can nurture faith and spiritual growth. Key, I believe, to a style of teaching that honors both the academic and spiritual is the *art* of conversation.

For the first thousand years or so of the Church's history, theology, in so far as it was a formal discipline, was practiced in the monastery and shaped by the monastic ethos of contemplation. The purpose of it was wisdom of life. Then, at the turn to the second millennium, the beginning of the Scholastic era, theology left the monastery and went off to school (schola), to become a science in the emerging universities. Many of you know how confusing that can be for your spiritual life. The purpose of the academy is more rational knowledge than spiritual wisdom, and the ethos and style of the university is didactic with teachers as experts lecturing to students who know little. Theology put up no resistance to this mode, in fact, it embraced it. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm convinced that there is a place for the didactic, even for a well-crafted lecture on occasion in theological education but, if that's all we do, the theological and spiritual will remain separated. I'm proposing that, as we embraced the academic, we left too much of the monastery behind. We need to retrieve it, and, silent as those old monks and sisters were, *conversation* may be the key.

The epitome of the monastic theological method was the *lectio divine* the spiritual reading of the *sacra pagina*, the sacred pages of Scripture, and then reading God's revelation in what they called the *book of the world* found in nature and life experiences. The inner dynamic of this "reading" was to create a conversation between their "life" and "the text"—between what was "going on" and what they were hearing from Scripture, between what God was saying in the Scriptures for life, and what God was saying in daily life that helped them to read the Scrip-

tures. In a sense, the dynamic was a constant conversation, an exchange, a to-and-fro process of bringing their lives to the Faith and the Faith to their lives. When one approached one's spiritual director, the mode was also of conversation. The task of this "friend of the soul" was to draw out (educere) what is already there, i.e., God's presence and the person's desire for God which is mirror of God's prior desire for the person. This divine seed is always already within a person; the best way to draw it out and nurture it to bear fruit is through spiritual conversation.

Exercise in Discourse

It would be an anomaly, at least, if I simply lectured you about conversation; so let me invite you more actively into the discourse. I will pose a few questions and we will reflect quietly after each; you may want to take some notes for yourself.

- Choose somebody from your own faith journey who was very significant in your spiritual nurture, a real spiritual mentor and, if possible, someone who was influential on you during your adolescent years.
- As the person comes back to mind again, relish the memory.
- Begin to reflect on why this person was effective as a spiritual mentor; why did they come to mind again this morning?
- I now invite you to turn to a neighbor and say hello, if you haven't already. If you don't feel like talking about your spiritual mentor, then don't bother—just listen to the neighbor. I find that the neighbor always has something to say!

Small Group Conversation I

Dr. Groome: I would like to invite some of the wisdom you gleaned from those memories and conversations. A few volunteers?

Speaker 1: "My mother. She had such a gentleness and patience with me. I could say or vent anything to her, and she would listen. I don't think there is any woman I would feel more privileged to be like than my mother."

Dr. Groome: Thank you. What a great patience she had but she also must have had a deep spiritual center, that's usually what's behind a disposition of peace and gentleness.

Speaker 2: "I had a teacher that did not tell me just what the Church says, but also taught me to reflect on why the Church says what it does; she taught us to think for ourselves, even about our Faith."

Dr. Groome: What a gift that is to young peoples' lives, to ask the questions and to invite reflection! Of course, a teacher needs to have a deep Faith to authentically do that. Religion teachers, especially, must be convinced that this great Faith tradition of ours, Catholic Christianity, can stand up under scrutiny, that questioning can, in fact, help to deepen one's appreciation for it. This is, of course, an old Catholic conviction, you hear it in Aquinas, Rahner, Lonergan, and today in Elizabeth Johnson, Rosemary Ruether, and many more—that questioning and critical reflection can eventually bring people to God, to Ultimate Mystery, who holds us graciously.

Speaker 3: "A priest in my high school years in our small parish. He was a stabilizing force in my life; he listened to me and encouraged me along my spiritual journey. In later years he left the priesthood and married. I saw him a few years before he died... and I was able to thank him and tell him how much he meant to me in those years."

Dr. Groome: What a blessing for him and for you that you got to say that to him.

(Other speakers - inaudible on tape).

Dr. Groome: Let me make a summary comment. Notice that everyone we heard from has focused, in one way or another, on a person who listened to them or asked them good questions; both are integral to "conversation". We have already, perhaps, made our point.

What is Christian Spirituality?

Let's take on the question: What is Christian spirituality? I believe we have a rich Catholic response to it. Christian spirituality is surely one of the richest aspects of the tradition. Let me propose a few characteristics.

1) There is surely a *transcendent* dimension to spirituality. It is a "God-consciousness" about life and about living one's life. This seems obvious, but not to be taken for granted. There are lots of literatures and

movements out there which claim to be "spirituality" but never mention God or the transcendent. I don't disparage them, though how they differ from a philosophy of life is not clear to me. Certainly, a Catholic Christian spirituality is focused on God and on one's relationship with God.

Beyond that, Christian spirituality focuses on our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we see epitomized what is at the base of all Christian spirituality, the conviction that God comes looking for us. Jesus is the Incarnate Moment of God coming looking for us. Now, remember, it is God who takes the initiative. It is God's unconditional and never ending desire for us that awakens our own spiritual desire for God and moves us into our own spirituality. Our desire for God is only the reflection of God's prior desire for us. Yes, spirituality is our reach for the transcendent. Yet, we are prompted to it only because the transcendent "allures" us. God draws us to Godself and the divine spark within us prompts us to respond. I repeat an earlier point just for our own protection in order not to be overwhelmed by the task, that this is primarily God's work. God is working in the hearts and souls of our students. Between them it is, and we are only second-level partners in it all.

2) Christian spirituality is *ontological*. What do I mean by this? Basically, that it engages the very depths of people, our "being." The old Greek term for that is *ontos*, which gives us the word, ontology. So, spirituality engages our whole person, much as Jesus said about living the great commandment, "with all one's mind, heart, strength," and then added, "with all your soul."(Luke 10:27) Spirituality pertains to our souls, the deepest aspects of our "being" (both as noun and verb), who we are and how we live our lives in the world.

3) Christian spirituality is *wholesome*. The stereotype of "holiness" is often negative, as if it means becoming some kind of a wimpy "churchmouse," certainly not having any fun or enjoyment. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth about Catholic spirituality. It should be tremendously wholesome, vibrant and vital, life affirming and life celebrating, life-giving for self and others. In Catholic spirituality, the more fully alive we become the more holy we become because the glory of God is the human person fully alive. As Jesus said best of all, "I came that you might have life and have it to the full." (Jn. 10:10) Josef Goldbrunner wrote a little book many years ago in the aftermath of Vatican II; its title said it all, *Holiness Is Wholeness*.

4) Christian spirituality is essentially one's *relationship with God*, and

to be "holy" and "whole" in this relationship means to live with justice, i.e., becoming holy means to grow in living justly. It is significant to note that the biblical understanding of holiness of life is "right relationship" with God, self, others, and creation; and the biblical notion of justice is the same, that is, right relationship. From a biblical perspective, then, to be holy and to be just are two sides of the same coin, living the covenant relationship, be that Old or New! You hear this in Micah 6:8; all that God asks of humankind is that we "live justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God." We find the same in the New Testament when Jesus puts the commandments of love together. Love of neighbor and authentic love of self cannot be separated from love of God. The prototype of how to live this holiness and justice in daily life, this "right relationship" is Jesus; it is His loving way that shows us the way to Christian spirituality as lived Faith.

5) Closely related to the previous point, Christian spirituality is *communal*, we can even say, ecclesial. This is a special emphasis in Catholic Christianity. I said earlier that "God comes looking for us," initiates the relationship, and then we respond. Well, God can do this outreach through everything and anything, through the ordinary and everyday, through every aspect of life. In Catholic faith the Church is the privileged locus of God's outreach and the community that empowers our response. As from the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures, God comes looking for us as a people and, though we must have our personal relationship with God, we cannot remain alone. Spirituality calls us into the Faith community and through the Faith community into the world.

6) Though you may add other characteristics, because my list is not nearly exhaustive, the last one I would propose here is that Christian spirituality is, in fact, one's *way of life*, that is, how we actually live. We often think spirituality is synonymous with our prayer life, but, in fact, it is synonymous with our life and with how we live. Our prayer life is needed to sustain and nourish our spirituality, our "God-consciousness," our "right relationship," but it is, finally, how we live. The way for Christians to live, to be holy, is the "way" of Jesus.

We can, perhaps, now draw together a summary description. I propose that Christian spirituality entails:

- our conscious attention to God's loving outreach and presence in our lives,
- our response of living for God's reign by the "loving way" of Jesus,

and

- our drawing upon and response to the grace of God's Holy Spirit through a Christian Faith community and in the midst of the world.

I would like to make one more comment before we hear some of what you are thinking. One of the biggest "changes" or, if you prefer, developments that came out of Vatican II was its rediscovery of a radical theology of baptism and, thus, the realization that all Christians are called to holiness of life. This is not something for an elite few. Holiness of life is the baptismal vocation of every Christian. Even the title of Chapter 5 of *Lumen Gentium* made this point well; it was entitled "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness." Look to the great *Magna Carta* of Christian spirituality, the Sermon on the Mount; notice that Matthew 5:1 begins with "turning to the crowds, He said..." This is for everyone!

I invite you to look at your own work, your teaching or pastoral ministry, and ask yourself:

- What are some of the things I do to nurture spiritual growth in my students? (Think about the intentional things, not the incidental ones.)
- In my own context: What do I find helpful by way of spiritual nurture for my students?
- What do I find to be among the biggest roadblocks to spiritual growth?

Small Group Conversation II

Dr. Groome: Let's hear from a few people. There were some things maybe that surprised you a bit when you stopped to think about them.

Speaker 1: I'm from Los Angeles. I start my lesson each day with a journal question. It is suggested by the content of the lesson. I give them five minutes to write and then another five to ten minutes for discussion. I think it encourages their spiritual growth. It also helps to set the tone for the rest of the day.

Dr. Groome: A journal is a great idea, especially for reticent adolescents. It at least helps them to "get it out there." Self expression is a learning process and helps with spiritual nurture. Give us an example of a question you might ask?

Speaker 1: Well, like the one you just asked us, about someone who

has had an influence on their lives, or an experience, or a real issue they are struggling with.

Dr. Groome: I get my undergraduate students to keep a journal around Scripture readings. I assign a key Scripture text for each week of the year beginning with Creation, then the Fall, then the call of Abraham and Sarah, and so on. They must read the text carefully and write in their journal about "what it says" and then about "what I hear from this text for my life." These questions set up a dialogue between themselves and the text; the first is a more academic question and the second a more spiritual one, trying to combine university and monastery.

Speaker 2: I send my teenagers off to do stories, not just their own story but to hear other people's stories, and especially their stories of Faith. For example, I send them out to talk with someone who is 65 or older to hear and record some piece of their Faith journey (what it was like when they made their First Communion or when a parent died, for instance), and then to come back, write it up, and share with each other. You'd be amazed at what they learn from it.

Dr. Groome: What a great way to give them access to the wisdom of the community, to draw upon the faith of "pilgrims" who are a little ahead of them, and what a wealth there is there. Imagine the reservoirs of wisdom in our retirement homes, the stories of faith, that we neglect to draw upon.

Speaker 3: I have my students do creative projects after a lesson. I have them use various artistic media. The key is that they express themselves and what they have learned for their life. Sometimes, I have them work in groups of two or three for this.

Dr. Groome: Great! I'm convinced that when you get people into their imaginations, into their creativity, you are also giving the Spirit free reign to work in their lives. The Spirit comes to us primarily through our imaginations, but a lot of teaching doesn't engage students imaginations and keeps out the Spirit. Yet, thank God, the Spirit blows where She will....

Speaker 4: I have a simple exercise that I often have students do before class. I'll give them a piece of paper with a statement of Faith and then a question to which they must respond personally, something rel-

evant to the lesson of the day, for example: "God wants to be in relationship with us. I want...." They have to finish the sentence and hand in the papers, without signing them. I then read out their responses. It gives a nice sense of what they want, and what makes them truly happy. It builds community, a sense of who we are.

Dr. Groome: What a great idea! It reflects the old Ignatian conviction that our own deepest desires are indications of God's desire for us. Certainly, getting people to name their desires is a great way of tending to their spirituality.

Speaker 5: I make my students do something physical. When they have been sitting a while, often hunched over their desks, I have them stand, stretch and do some good breathing. I have come to see it as a kind of spiritual thing, and they have, too.

Dr. Groome: Ah! We Christians have done so poorly in integrating the body into our spirituality. We should have done so well; after all, we claim that our God became flesh, but we have beaten up on the flesh more than most. Maybe, when we truly believe in the Incarnation, we will bring together our corporeality and our spirituality.

A Style of Conversation

As I said earlier, religious education for spiritual formation, the kind that touches and nurtures people's souls, requires conversation. *Conversari*, the Latin root, means to come together, to form community, to share life. True conversation is a two-way affair with people both sharing and listening, giving and receiving, a "to-and-fro" that is genuine exchange. Real conversation creates partnership and mutuality, and it encourages inclusion.

To think of conversation in an educational context shifts beyond didactic teaching to people sharing together their very lives. It is difficult to have real conversation without talking about life and this is, surely, essential to religious education or campus ministry for spiritual nurture. Conversation also invites people to reflect. We are confronted by the word of the "other" to look at what we really think, believe, hope for, and so on. Conversation establishes human relationship and our old Catholic sense of sacramentality is the conviction that the human is analogous to the Divine; in other words, to nurture real human relationship is already a step in the direction of holiness.

Conversation is not just between or among people in the teaching/learning situation; it is also a metaphor for the relationship you can encourage between your students and what they are learning. Let's take some of the "texts" of Christian tradition—and here we can mean "texts" broadly, as contemporary authors do. "Texts" could, for example, be an actual text of scripture, a symbol, a sacrament, or a creed. The style I am recommending is that you establish a conversation between your students and the texts, a kind of "give-and-take." As an example, send them to a piece of Scripture with the questions, "what does this text say to my life," and "what do I say in response." This "relationship" is in contrast to what critical Scripture scholars do in that they try to analyze the text "objectively," to "master it" with critical analysis. I don't mean to disparage critical scripture scholarship for it does have a contribution to make to religious education. My point is that a conversation approach invites the text to touch the hearts and souls of readers; it is the *lectio divina* of the old monastery, a contemplative reading in which the reader is more likely to be mastered by the text than to master it, in that it can change their lives.

Rationale

You are not, perhaps, convinced that a conversational approach to religious education is well advised; that it might not encourage the kind of spiritual formation I am claiming for it. I think I can summarize a rationale for a conversation approach with three points:

1) We are made for each other, for relationship. This conviction is reflected most dramatically in our Christian doctrine of the Trinity, i.e., the firm belief that our God is relationship, is a Triune "right relationship" of love. Both within Godself and toward us, God is loving relationship. We are made in God's own image and likeness, right? Thus, we are made for relationship, to love and be loved. Our very nature, then, advises a style of relationship and within our teaching dynamic, among other things, this recommends conversation.

2) Catholicism has an abiding understanding of Christian Faith as communal; we are to be the Body of Christ, a People of God in the world. This communal emphasis was retrieved for us by the Second Vatican Council, but the emphasis on "church," on being a community of Faith and living a communal Faith has been there from the beginning. When the Reformers downplayed the Church, and with some good reason, as sinful and exaggerating its own importance, Catholicism set out at the

great Council of Trent to reform itself. Yet, the sacramental role of the Church was still reiterated, that is, to be an effective sign that brings God and humankind together. A communal Faith would seem to advise a communal approach to its catechesis; it advises dialogue rather than monologue. To become the Body of Christ surely requires conversation among the members that comprise it.

3) My third reason is that if faith is to be lived, if it is to become a way of life, if it is to be a living faith, its pedagogy must then engage people's lives. You can get to people's heads without engaging their lives, but not to their souls. To engage their lives, to turn them to look at, reflect on, and make decisions for their lives is done best by conversation. They can sit there, listen, and learn about things for their lives, but they are more likely to "take it to heart" if they are active participants in the teaching/learning dynamic and that points to conversation.

How To Structure Conversation

Let me move now to my proposal about how to structure "conversation in Faith." You will have your own way of going about it, but it helps sometimes to have a schema, a kind of "cheat-chart" that suggests different questions and reflective activities to prompt conversation. Most everyday conversations, if they are a complete unit, have their own dynamic; they are not quite the same at the beginning as they are in the middle or as when winding down. Think about these "moves" and see if they might be helpful to encourage conversation in your religious education or pastoral ministry.

First, remember that in religious education for spiritual nurture you are ever attempting to get people to correlate their life and Christian Faith; that's what it's about, mediating between "life" and "faith," encouraging people to bring their lives to their faith and their faith to their lives. This is how Christianity becomes a "living faith," when it becomes people's spirituality touching their very "being." Then, as you imagine mediating between people's lives and Christian Faith and bringing the two together for this conversation, consider these commitments:

- *Engage people:* To get into people's souls, you have to engage them personally. Ask questions or invite reflections around issues of real interest to people, around what Freire calls "generative themes," stuff that generates real life and interest for them.

- *Invite personal expressions:* This can be done in many ways depending on age level, context, topic, and background. They can speak, write,

draw, create, dance, or any form of human expression. The key is to invite them to "put it out there," to express themselves and their lives, what they are really thinking, doing, feeling, or how they see "what's going on" around them. Key for the teacher is to invite students and give them the space and permission to really express themselves and their lives. Without this, conversation is not possible.

- *Encourage real reflection:* Invite students to think for themselves, to probe, to question, and in this to use the full breadth of their mental capacities, including reason, memory and imagination. If they are of age, not only will you encourage them to think, but also to think about their thinking, to analyze and probe their own reasoning, remembering, imagining, and to share all of this in conversation. Some people are surprised to hear that such critical reflection is a particular commitment of Catholic faith. From the beginning with Origen and Clement in the great catechetical school of Alexandria (began circa 200 CE), to Aquinas (circa 1250), to Vatican I (circa 1870), Catholicism has been convinced that reason and revelation are partners, that faith and understanding are friends.

- *Give access to tradition:* By tradition here I mean the whole rich treasury of Christian story and vision, the faith handed on to us and how we are to live it in our time. Giving people access to this "storehouse" means putting them personally in touch with it, setting up the kind of conversation or relationship with it that I spoke of earlier. It is easy enough for teachers to "tell" students about the tradition, and that may even bring them to know "about" it, but if it is to touch their souls, change their lives, nurture their spiritual growth, this is then done most readily, I believe, by giving them direct access to it, allowing them to encounter the tradition personally, and to share their reflections on this encounter.

- *Encourage appropriation:* Ask questions and create activities that encourage people to see for themselves, to make things their own, to integrate what they are learning into their perspectives and lives and, thus, changing them and bringing them new life. Again, it is easy enough for teachers to "tell" people what to see, but it is better to invite them to see for themselves. As they come to see, have them share that in conversation, and they will see all the more.

- *Invite decision:* Pose questions and activities that invite people to choose, to decide, to make commitments. The decisions can be intellectual,

affective, or behavioral. Remember, Christian Faith is to be lived. Such living requires decision, and such decision is prompted by conversation that invites it. In contrast to telling people what to do (monologue), invite them to decide (dialogue), and give them the support of conversation for their discernment and decision making.

Those of you who are familiar with Bernard Lonergan's work will recognize this schema as resonant with Lonergan's understanding of the dynamic of knowing: attend to the data, try to understand it, make judgments about it, and come to decision. I'm proposing that religious educators create conversation that helps people to do all of these, what Lonergan calls the "categorical imperatives." I'm saying that such conversation can be rigorously academic and, yet, can encourage spiritual growth as well. It can bring together again theology and spirituality.

I invite you to go back to your neighbor once more to "see" what you are both thinking and feeling; maybe there is an insight emerging that you might like to share and clarify, or a bit of wisdom you would both like to take away, especially for your own work and style of going about your ministry. Have a chat for a while and then we will come back together and wind down.

Small Group Conversation III

Dr. Groome: Let's hear from a few people before we close.

Speaker 1: When I am teaching my seventh graders the Scriptures, I will invite them to put themselves into the story, to figure out, for example, who they are like or want to be like.

Dr. Groome: Great idea! It can also help to have them take on different characters, such as the Good Samaritan story: When are you the poor person in the ditch? When are you the priest or Levite? When are you the Good Samaritan?

Speaker 2: What you are recommending is a particular challenge for those of us responsible to assign grades. This is very difficult. I can't grade someone on their faith.

Dr. Groome: You are certainly correct in calling it a challenge. You can't give someone a "D" for their life and how they live. Yet, even within a conversation or "faith-sharing" approach, I think you can still grade on their knowledge of information and facts, on personal under-

standing of something, on the quality of reflection, on level of participation, on investment and effort. Yes, indeed, it is a challenge.

Speaker 3: I think you can combine the two, the academic and spiritual, even in an exam. For example, I gave an essay question to juniors in a New Testament course: "Explain the three favored titles in the post resurrection community for Jesus. Then, come up with your own favored title for today, say what it means for your life, and why you chose it." In reality, this is an 8-point essay, but the last one asks for more than the academic answer.

Dr. Groome: Great example! And, now, we must close. Thank you all for your participation. It has been a delight to be with you. May God continue to bless your work abundantly.

Dr. Thomas Groome, currently teaching theology and religious education at Boston College, received his masters in Divinity from St. Patrick's Seminary in Carlow, Ireland, and a masters in religious education at Fordham University. He finished his formal education with a doctorate in religion and education at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University Teachers College in New York. His portfolio includes two religion series, God with Us *and* Coming to Faith; *three books and more than 60 articles on religious education, pastoral ministry, and issues in theology.*

Religious Education in Catholic Seondary Schools: Patterns and Possibilities for the '90s and Beyond

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Mr. Lund developed this manuscript following his participation in the NCEA conference for high school religion teachers and campus ministers held at the University of Dayton, June, 1995.

A Fictional Case Study: Sleepless in San Diego

ould you stop your tossin' and turnin' and just go to sleep!" Teresa's husband groused. It was two o'clock in the morning. "I can't," she sighed with just enough effect to make her husband feel bad that he had snapped at her. "Why not, honey?" he asked in a kinder voice, trying to get back into his wife's good graces. It didn't work. Teresa was stressed-out.

Teresa Aparicio is a high school religion teacher, and the next day she had to teach a unit on the Trinity to her class of very skeptical sophomores. She could just imagine her students' comments after trying to explain to them why Catholics believe in one God who is revealed as three Persons:

Tomas: Right, Missus Aparicio, anything you say!
Kathleen: Yeah, right, Missus Aparico. And I'll bet you'll also be tellin' us why the Pope can't make a mistake.
Mrs. Aparicio: Stay tuned, Kathleen.
Satbir: Well, it sounds to me like Catholics really believe in three

gods, not one.

Mrs. Mac: *No, Satbir, Catholics are strict monotheists, remember.*

Omar: *I don't get it, one God, three Persons?*

Clara: *With all the evil and suffering in the world, I don't see how there is even one God, let alone three.*

Bill: *{thinking to himself} This is way too deep for me.*

Jenna: *Hey, Missus A., when are you gonna tell us why the Church says we can't have sex before we're married?*

Mrs. Aparicio: *We'll get to that later, Jenna. Let's get back to the Trinity.*

Suzanne: *[audibly, under her breath] Who cares?*

Now, Teresa really couldn't get to sleep.

Introduction

Throughout its history Catholic education has been wisely engaged in a thorough process of self-examination, a process that has borne much fruit. Catholic schools have, as a result, articulated and implemented a vision for the effective education of students. At the threshhold of the 21st century religion teachers in Catholic high schools have many resources on which to draw in order to further develop their vision for religious education. In this chapter an attempt will be made to articulate such a vision for the mission of Catholic secondary religious education, in general, and the roles played by effective religious educators, in particular.

Although methods in religious education have changed over the years, three principles remain constant:

1) The primary goal of Catholic secondary religious education is to teach students clearly and accurately the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the Catholic faith tradition;
2) The primary objective for religious educators is to provide students with a variety of opportunities for them to reflect on the connection between the Good News of Jesus Christ and their lived experience; and
3) The primary outcome is that students will be better able to know, love and serve God by knowing, loving and serving others.[1]

What follows is one perspective on the nature and practice of secondary religious education in Catholic schools. Hopefully, this will be helpful to Teresa and others like her who strive to make each religion class a meaningful encounter between the story of the Christian Faith and the story of each individual student.[2]

Secondary Religious Education: A Dialogue

An "Either-Or" or "Both-And" Approach?

In his writings on Christian religious education, Thomas Groome shows that effective religious educators are those who establish a communal dialogue between their students' concrete life experience and the ongoing story of the two-thousand-year Christian event.[3] The term Groome gives to this dialogue is *shared praxis.*[4] Rev. James DiGiacomo, SJ, notes that a *shared praxis* approach fosters a "delicate balance" between the unambiguous articulation of Catholic doctrine and the voicing of students' ideas, questions and critiques.[5] In such a setting opportunities are created for *both* teachers and students to critically examine and evaluate their past and present life experiences in light of the Gospel message. Effective religious educators create such opportunities through the balanced use of both student-centered and content-centered methods which are adapted to students' cognitive and affective abilities. In such an atmosphere, students' getting good grades in religion class is not a primary "outcome." With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the sense of Christian community which is fostered in a *shared praxis* approach, the primary outcome will be that both teachers and students will be better able to see and experience the presence of the living God in their lives.[6]

Such an approach has brought some much needed clarity regarding the mission entrusted to Catholic secondary religious education. For many years there has been significant discussion and debate over whether high school religion teachers are "catechists" or "religious educators."[7] At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, it can be said that the focus of the catechetical approach is the affective experience of the believer, while the focus of the religious education approach is the cognitive understanding of the learner. "Catechists" are those who provide instruction for those already converted and baptized. In a catechetical setting the goal is the deepening of the Christian's faith through personal reflection, Faith-sharing, and community-building as well as input from the catechist on the content of tradition and Scripture. "Religious educators" are those who help students examine the phenomena of Christian thought and experience from a more cognitive or academic standpoint. The focus of this group is more on "content" than it is on "experience."

For many years religion teachers have found this balancing act between the affective and cognitive aspects of their jobs difficult to maintain. On the one hand, those who favor a catechetical approach want to appeal to their students' hearts and souls. After all is said and done, they say, religion teachers (as catechists) are not teaching a *what* but a *who*. The main topic of religion class is Almighty God who, as loving

Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, is the ultimate origin, destiny and meaning of human existence. If the teaching of religion involves little more than the students' retention of enormous amounts of information, which they perceive to have little (if anything) to do with their lives, it is of questionable value. On the other hand, "religious educators" feel that if religion classes are to have any credibility at all, then they must call students to a certain degree of intellectual rigor and accountability. The topics covered in religion class, they say, are far too important to be treated in a "lightweight" manner. In order for the teaching of religion to have "respectability" in relation to the other academic subjects in a secondary curriculum, it must challenge students to think deeply and critically about the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.

An example of this tension between the "catechetical" and "religious education" aspects of their job is the stress many high school religion teachers feel as they struggle to cover, in a limited amount of time, all of the major areas of Catholic doctrine and practice rightly required by diocesan and school curriculums. This stress is fueled by their desire to accomplish this in a way which provides students with meaningful experiences of Jesus' Gospel and Christian faith. It is the "meaningful experiences" part of our job which, as we all know, takes a great deal of planning, class time, and patience. Despite these pressures connections can, however, be made between the stories of Faith and our students' life experience in ways that take little time. In a discussion on Jeremiah's complaint to God about the mistreatment he received from his fellow Judahites, for example, a teacher could ask students to identify (verbally or in writing) times when they were rejected by peers for doing the right thing, times when their words were either ignored or deliberately misunderstood by others, or times when they felt like failures despite giving their best efforts.[8] From these a discussion on the prophets could be more meaningful because a connection was made between the students' experience and the experience of a specific prophet. Although the time invested in this one exercise would be minimal, the teaching value would be significant.

Over the years the inclusion of increasing numbers of students in Catholic high schools who come from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds has necessitated a re-examination of this debate. Given this heterogeneous make-up of our students, secondary religion teachers are called to be *both* catechists and religious educators. They are called to be catechists for those students for whom religion class is an opportunity to deepen their Faith. For those students who are seeking (or are being requested by graduation requirements to seek) an accurate

intellectual understanding of the Catholic faith, their teachers are called to be religious educators. Pointing out this reality in our classrooms, Graham Rossiter and Marissa Crawford call this "either-or" debate an example of the "false dichotomy" between the "sharing of faith" and the "teaching of religion."[9] A *shared-praxis* approach allows for a "both-and" solution to this debate in that students are called to think deeply and critically about the Story of Christ and his disciples in a way that challenges them to reflect deeply and critically about their own stories. Since Catholic schools are an expression of the evangelical mission of the Church, both affective and cognitive teaching strategies for the teaching of the faith are equally necessary, effective and valued.[10] In a "both-and" approach the catechetical and religious education approach, while distinct from each other, can be seen as complementary "flip sides of the same coin."[11]

Sleepless in San Diego: Notes I

Although a discussion on ancient philosophical notions about "personhood" and on the finer points surrounding the concept "hypostasis" would certainly be appropriate for a graduate theology course, Teresa would be facing an ocean of blank stares if she chose to lecture her students on the Trinity using these terms. Even if she didn't use these terms she would still have faced a sea of expressionless faces if she used the lecture method as her only teaching technique.

One option would be for Teresa to have had students read and discuss what the Book of Genesis means when it says that both men and women are made in God's image and likeness. From there students could have discussed what characteristics make up a human person (viz., consciousness, ability to deliberate and make decisions, ability to love and forgive, creativity) and then see if any connections can be made to God's reality. Teresa could, next, have the student identify how each person is a triune reality—body, mind, spirit—and how each of these distinct realities make up the one human being. Teresa could have then discussed how the Church gradually came to an awareness of God's triune nature, making very clear to her students that the analogy from human experience is nothing but a vague approximation of the true inner-reality of the triune God disclosed to us through revelation.[12]

Although this approach does not reflect all of the aspects of a shared praxis method, it does begin with the students' stories (their lived experience). Beginning with the students' experience, Teresa could work her way up to God. In so doing a dialogue can start between the wisdom of the Christian vision and the wisdom of the students' reflections. Thus, not only are students afforded an opportunity to better understand what it means to be human, but also a deeper understanding of the profound mystery of God.

The Religion Teacher's Example

If such a learning environment is to be a productive one, then a religious educator's faith life is almost as important as the faith that is taught. On the high school level, the teacher's example is a powerful tool of evangelization. We were cautioned some time ago to reflect on our attitudes and behavior since our example might be "...the only Gospel your neighbor ever reads."[13] Students can smell a phony a mile away; therefore, effective religious educators must be those who live what they teach. Religious educators in Catholic schools who do not honestly attempt to live by Jesus' example or practice the Catholic faith run the risk of demoralizing their students and may soon find their efforts to be exercises in futility. Such teachers do a grave injustice to the Gospel and their students. Religious educators need to take care that their students "read" in them models of faith, hope, love, service, holiness and prayer. Since the life and message of Christ is their primary topic, religious educators in Catholic schools are called to model His attitudes and behavior in all their interactions with students, parents, and colleagues.

Religious educators come to their schools each day with their own personal opinions, biases, questions, and concerns—all of which, naturally, influence how they teach their students. Wise religious educators are those who choose, as much as possible, to keep their subjective perspectives to themselves. They are called to teach students how to think critically so that these young persons may be able to see for themselves the redemptive power of the Gospel and the full meaning of the Catholic Faith. In order for students to be able to freely accept for themselves the teachings of Christ and the Faith of the Church, they have a right to understand clearly what the *Church* teaches. Religious educators who too frequently (or imprudently) disclose their subjective feelings run the risk of confusing their students. The wise religious educator is one who knows when it is educationally and pastorally appropriate on those rare occasions to share with students their own personal opinions, questions, and concerns. After all, religious educators in Catholic schools are called to teach Christ, and not themselves.[14]

This is not to say that all a religion teacher is called to do is to *merely* impart information about the content of a Gospel passage or the history of the development of the Church's doctrine. Our main topic is the "Good News", a proclamation from our Lord about the origins, meaning, and ultimate purpose of human existence. It is a word which brings "...glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind." It is a word which lets the "oppressed go free" and brings us life "to the

full." If all we're about is making sure our students retain a certain amount of data for later cognitive regurgitation on a quiz or a test, then we're in the wrong business. Religion teachers are called to touch the (often hardened and jaded) hearts of the specific young persons God has called them to serve. In order to do this, religion teachers are called to share their own Faith stories with their students in a way that builds up students' appreciation for Jesus' message and Christian living.

Effective religion teachers are those who are able to reach these hearts because their own hearts have first been touched by the meaning and power of Christ's redemptive message. Someone once said that Christianity is not so much *taught* as it is *caught*. Most of us did not come to know and love God because of a course we took on, say, "The God of Israel vs. the gods of the Canaanites." We came, instead, to know and love God because God first knew and loved each one of us. Indeed, each of us came to know of God's prior love and knowledge because of those before us who loved us enough to not only tell us about Christ but also to treat us in a Christ-like manner. One cannot give what one does not have. Effective religion teachers are those who practice what they teach. Effective religion teachers are those who give what has been given to them. They are those who do, in fact, look and act redeemed.[15]

Putting It In Perspective

In *Teaching Religion in a Catholic Secondary School*, Rev. DiGiacomo outlines some of the "occupational hazards" that face anyone "brave or idealistic enough to attempt religious instruction in high schools." According to Fr. DiGiacomo these hazards include: tension, frustration, and a guilt that "saps energy, drains enthusiasm, and sometimes leads to burnout."[16]

For veteran and rookie teachers alike Rev. DiGiacomo offers support and advice.

> ...It is all well and good to place a high value on one's work and to take satisfaction in the real contributions teachers make to young people's growth. And, while teachers should certainly hold themselves to high standards of performance, they should take care not to exaggerate the importance of their role....the teacher is but one of many influences in students' lives, and probably not near the top of the list. Once teachers have done their best, they should leave the rest to the student and to God. The results, after all, are up to them. Not only do teachers have no idea of how the story will turn out, but they also really don't know how the story is developing. They can interpret behavior, but only God can read hearts. Some of the teenagers that teachers most worry about may

be in much better spiritual health than they think.

Most religion teachers are idealistic people who care about their students and want very much to enrich their lives. That's a beautiful combination of qualities, but it is also the prescription for a potentially vulnerable person. The prevention or the cure for tension, frustration, and guilt lies not in diminishing idealism or denying vulnerability, but in keeping a sense of balance and perspective. There are no guarantees that one will never be hurt, but they will help one heal faster, last longer, and do a lot more good.[17]

As we go about our important work, religious educators of the '90s would do well to remember that we are merely instruments in God's hands. Although we can be very important persons in our students' lives, the work of creation, redemption and sanctification ultimately belongs to God and is accomplished by God. Our role is to humbly point the way, clear up confusion, and, perhaps, open some hearts so that our students will be better able to recognize the presence of God. Although we have a grave responsibility regarding the spiritual development of the young people God has entrusted to us, whether or not our students live lives of faith, hope and love is, in the end, up to them.

Sleepless in San Diego: Notes II

Teresa does not need to pretend that the doctrine of the Trinity is a simple concept to understand. It is perfectly acceptable for her to admit that she does not fully understand the true inner-nature of the God-head (who does?). The service Teresa can provide her students is that, regarding the Trinity, she has thought about it, reflected on it, prayed for understanding, and, as their religion teacher who is "further down the road", she has some wisdom to offer on the subject. Teresa need not hit pedagogical "home runs" day in and day out in every one of her religion classes. Ten years after they have graduated from high school, Teresa's students will no longer remember every point she made about the development of the Church's Trinitarian doctrines. What they will remember, hopefully, is that Teresa Aparicio was a woman of faith who not only taught her students the content of the Catholic Faith, but also how to live and love others in a way Jesus would approve. They would remember this because of the respect, attentiveness, concern, compassion, and wisdom she offered her students on a daily basis.

Roles of Religious Educators

In the previous section we explored the nature of Catholic secondary religious education as well as the importance of the religion teacher's example. We also examined some of the stresses and tensions such teachers face as they strive to instruct their students in as thorough and meaningful a manner as possible. As religious educators explore various patterns and possibilities for the work they do, it becomes clear that they play the following roles:

- missionaries
- theological thinkers/reflectors
- cultivators
- catalysts
- mentors

Let us take a brief look at these roles which Catholic secondary religion teachers are called to play in the '90s and beyond.

Missionaries

Marisa Crawford and Graham Rossiter characterize high school religion teachers as "missionaries to a teenage culture."[18] They point out that the modern generation gap is unavoidable and that adults and teenagers often operate out of different cultures, each with their own standards, expectations, values, rites of passage, role models, and idols. The idea of a "monolithic" teenage culture is, however, an illusion perpetuated by film, television, and other media producers. In a pluralistic society such as ours, high school students come from a variety of ethnic, racial, geographic, economic, and religious backgrounds. Effective religious educators see themselves as "missionaries" to these teenage cultures. Like missionaries, religious educators in Catholic schools are called to affirm what is healthy and lifegiving in these cultures and, using the Gospel as a touchstone, to not be afraid to challenge and transform what is unhealthy and death-dealing. Wise religious educators also know that they, too, are influenced for good or ill, by the mores of the society in which they were raised and that, quite often, have much to learn from the questions, critiques, energy, idealism, and genuine goodness of their students.

Modern missionaries know that their role is no longer merely "to bring Christ to unevangelized pagans."[19] They have, instead, discovered that Christ is already present and active within the various cultures they have

immersed themselves. Indeed, they are humbly aware that it is the Holy Spirit who makes faith possible. Their role is to clarify the implications of such faith. Modern missionaries also know that the primary gift they have to offer is the concrete awareness of the Risen Christ's presence in the rhythms of daily life as well as in the watershed moments of human existence. Religious educators in the '90s must do the same: they must simultaneously bring Christ to and find Christ already present in the young people they serve.

Theological Thinkers/Reflectors

Classroom Voices I

"Ms. Buckley, the universe is so infinite. Why would God bother with us? And if God created the universe, who created God?"

"Mr. Bennett, if God really didn't create the world in seven days and if Adam and Eve didn't really exist, then why should we believe in any other Bible story?"

"Sister Angie, how can Jesus still be human even without sin? Isn't it part of the human condition to be evil?"

"Fr. Lorenz, how can a celibate person tell us about what is and is not morally acceptable when it comes to sex."

"Mrs. Doyle, my cousin committed suicide last summer. Is he in Hell?"

"Bro. Gabriel, are you saying it's not okay for my dad and stepmom to go to communion unless he gets an annulment from my mom?"

"Come on, Mr. Robison, there ain't no way Jesus could be God, he was just another rebel who got in trouble with the authorities."

"Look, Miss Peterson, when we die, that's it. It's over. All this rising-from-the-dead stuff is just wishful thinking."

High school religion teachers earn their paycheck every day. It is one of the most challenging jobs anywhere in education. Not only do religion teachers need to know about history, politics, psychology, art, music, science, biology, ethics, philosophy, literature, pop culture, and current events, but they must also know the Bible and have a solid understanding of the two-thousand-year development of Catholic doctrine. Religion teachers are called on any given day to speak intelligently on

any one of these topics as they attempt to answer the challenging questions students pose them.

These questions are often very complex and call for thoughtful answers. They are expressions of the teenager's growing ability to discover and ponder the fundamental meaning of life.[20] At root these questions are expressions of the human awareness of the ineffable. These questions can even, perhaps, be considered experiences of God. As such, these questions are *theological* in that they are seeking the ultimate origins and purpose of existence. In order to help students discover "answers" to these questions, a religion teacher must first be a person who asks similar questions. Although one need not have a bachelor's or master's degree in theology to seek the answers to such questions, a "humble and contrite" heart is an essential starting-point.

In a religion class students have, however, a right to know that the teacher before them is one who has thought deeply and, yes, even scholarly, about the questions they pose about life, love, justice, and God. The religion teacher is called to share with students not only how Jesus answers the fundamental questions of human existence but also how Jesus *is* the answer to these fundamental questions. In this process the religion teacher is called to not only describe what the Church teaches, but also to explain *why* in as accurate and pastorally sensitive a manner as possible.

In order to do this well, religion teachers need a solid foundation in the following areas: Scripture, Christology, ecclesiology, sacraments and the liturgical year, church history, moral theology, Catholic social teachings, spirituality and prayer, eschatology, adolescent development (psychology, spirituality, and moral development), and methods and principles of religious education and catechesis. Given the identity and mission of Catholic secondary education, the teaching of religion must be seen as the most important area of a school's curriculum.[21] If Catholic schools are to continue to value the vital roles played by their religion teachers, then the systematic professional training and education of religion teachers must be given a priority in the '90s and beyond. The importance of Catholic secondary religious education requires that much more care must be given to the recruitment and training of qualified religion teachers.

In the "real world" in which Catholic high school principals and religion department chairpersons live, finding persons trained in the abovementioned areas is, however, often very difficult. Many times a person who has had a few undergraduate courses in theology or religious studies will do. I do not diminish the good work and contribution of such

teachers, but the credibility of Catholic secondary religious education depends in no small way on the theological training and pedagogical ability of religion teachers. In religion class there are, in fact, "right answers" about the content of Catholic doctrine, spirituality, history, and practices.[22] Regarding the importance of a well-trained religion teacher, The Congregation for Catholic Education has said:

> ...an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm. Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic Schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation. In Catholic schools today, these teachers tend more and more to be lay people, and they should have the opportunity of receiving experiential knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of the Church that priests and religious automatically acquire in the course of their formation....[23]

In the '90s and beyond, the majority of religion teachers will be lay people. We need to find new and more effective ways of recruiting, educating, and training religion teachers. Since states recognize neither theology nor religious education as subject areas in their teacher credential programs (nor are these subjects offered in many public colleges/universities), Catholic institutions of higher learning, in partnership with diocesan departments of education and local schools, will need to find creative ways of providing *low-cost* educational opportunities for lay persons interested in becoming religion teachers. Such "centers of formation" could also be of benefit for veteran religion teachers who wish to further their theological and pedagogical knowledge.[24]

Cultivators

In his book, *Becoming a Catechist*, Rev. William O'Malley, SJ, goes beyond the oft-quoted analogy that religious educators merely "sow seeds" of Gospel values in their students' hearts and minds, seeds which will bear fruit in some distant future.[25] Religious educators find, more often than not, that the "soil" of their students' hearts and minds has been hardened by the false values of individualism, materialism and moral-relativism. Religious educators of the '90s are called to "plow the soil" of their students' minds and hearts so that they might fruitfully receive whatever Gospel seeds they encounter in their daily lives.

In order to do this they must first have a realistic understanding of what exactly is in the minds and hearts of the students who are actually present in their classrooms. This requires much effort on the part of adults. We are often tempted to look at *today's* students through the "lenses" of our own teenage years or to "sum them up" according to

whatever label (e.g., "Generation X") is currently in vogue.[26] In order to be credible, religious educators are called to listen deeply to their students' life stories, ideas, questions, concerns, critiques, hopes and dreams. Only after such work is done, can teachers begin to develop meaningful ways for students to engage in a dialogue between their stories and the story of Christ and His disciples.

Given that more and more of our students are "unchurched", it has become even more important for religion teachers to know what is (or is not) going on in the hearts and minds of their students. An alarming number of our *Catholic* students rarely, if ever, attend Mass or celebrate the other sacraments. Although many have gone through quite a few years of Catholic school religion classes or parish programs, neither the teachings and spirituality of the Church nor affiliation with a local parish community are major factors in their lives. Many students arrive at our schools as freshmen whose last contact with the Church was on their First Communion day. For those students who have had many years of religious education, but are without the lived experience of Catholic Christian community in the home and parish, religion classes can be a major "turn-off." This is exacerbated when they have to read religion textbooks which utilize a devotional language that assumes the reader is a practicing Catholic.[28] Add to the mix "churched" and "unchurched" students from other Christian traditions as well as those with no religious affiliation. For many of these students, the teachings of the Catholic Church are one, among many, value-systems which may (or may not) have much to say to them.

For religion teachers new to the profession, the "who cares?" response of their students to discussions of Catholic beliefs and practices may come as quite a shock. In addition to apathy, religion teachers often bear the brunt of students' hostility and resentment because the latter have been called to think critically about long-held "common sense" attitudes and oft-practiced behaviors that have been called into question. This is especially the case when the discussion focuses on Church teachings which, to the adolescent mind, seem counter-intuitive. Like partners in an arranged marriage, teachers and students in many religion classes are often those who "over time, learn to love each other."

Religious educators of the '90s are called to find ways of building bridges between the value systems, symbols, and cultures of their students and the heritage of the Catholic Faith. As "cultivators" they are called to invest much of their time designing interesting activities which engage students' imaginations in order to open up them up to new patterns and new possibilities for their lives. Experience has taught that unless such "groundwork" is done, explicit discussions of Church doctrines and prac-

tices will be met with rolling eyes and incredulous ears. The use of teaching methods that engage students' imaginations will, hopefully, challenge them to critically examine their experiences, values, opinions, and the issues of the day from the perspective of Jesus' Gospel and the wisdom of the Catholic faith.

Catalysts

In laboratory experiments scientists often use catalysts. A catalyst is a substance used to initiate, speed up, or slow down a chemical reaction. Religious educators often play a similar role. As DiGiacomo points out, religious educators cannot presume their students' interest in the topics found in even the best thought-out religion curriculum. Such interest must often be ignited through the careful and creative use of a variety of methods.[29] Religious educators in Catholic schools are called to be "catalysts" who create situations which motivate students to grow in their understanding of Christian faith and practice.[30] In order to be effective, religious educators must use a variety of methods which engage the various learning aptitudes and styles of all their students.[31] Unlike the catalysts of the scientific laboratory, however, religious educators do not remain unchanged by the dynamics they create in their classrooms or on their retreats. The Holy Spirit has a way of inspiring both educators and students to new ways of loving, understanding, and serving others. Despite well-planned lessons (guided by clear goals, objectives, and learning outcomes), the Holy Spirit opens up both educators and students to new questions, insights, patterns, and possibilities for understanding life and living the Gospel.

If Teresa had begun her unit on the Trinity with a lecture (using jargon understood by graduate theology students), she would have turned her students into passive recipients of information which had little, if anything, to do with their lives. The subjects covered in secondary religious education classrooms are far too important to be presented in a way that turns students off. As mentioned above, religion teachers are called to cover a tremendous number of concepts and are often afforded limited time and resources. Given this reality, the temptation to use teacher-centered or content-centered methods is great.[32] The exclusive use of lectures, which too often merely outline the main points in a given chapter, will ensure that teachers will finish their syllabi by the end of the semester. Using this method will, however, turn their students into dutiful scribes who can cram instead of study, recite instead of reflect. As a result, students may learn little more than how to earn enough points to get a particular grade instead of thinking deeply about the Gospel's redemptive message. Although presentations are useful ways to intro-

duce and summarize important concepts, they cannot be the "meat and potatoes" of a teacher's pedagogical repertoire.

Mentors

Classroom Voices II

"Bro. Hui, you said that Jesus said we need to 'turn the other cheek.' What am I supposed to tell my mom next time I see her with another black eye?"

"Sister Charlotte, my little brother's really sick with cancer. I love him so much, why is God letting this happen to him?"

"Mr. Ferretti, my mom just lost her job. She told me I may have to transfer at the end of the semester because she can't afford the tuition here."

"Fr. Enrique, my coach told me that if I don't get a 'C' average on my next report card, he's gonna kick me off the team."

"Mrs. Schnieder, I'm late with my period. I don't know what to do! I thought you couldn't get pregnant the first time you had sex."

"Ms. Flaherty, if someone calls me a [racial slur] why shouldn't I beat the [expletive] out of him?"

"Mr. Simms, my older brother just found out he has HIV. I'm the only one in the family who knows about this and he doesn't want me to tell Mom and Dad."

Religious educators in Catholic schools are often called to help young persons who are seeking answers to difficult questions like these. As our society becomes more complex and conflicted, the stakes of adolescent life will be increasingly higher and more intense. Thus, teenagers' questions will be more challenging, direct, and explicit.[33] Since they are often called to share the story of their faith journey with their students,[34] religious educators are quite often the adults young people seek out for answers to difficult questions and for advice in tough situations. Religious educators in Catholic schools must concern themselves not only with their students' academic growth; they are often called to take a personal and pastoral interest in their emotional, social and spiritual growth as well. As adults, religious educators are "further down the road" on the journey of faith and have much to offer.

In their roles as mentors, religious educators are called to give guidance, support, and encouragement in a manner faithful to Catholic teachings. Although they are often called (and are willing) to assume this role,

experienced religious educators know that they are not trained counsellors or psychologists protected by the "privilege of confidentiality," nor are they priests bound by the "seal of confession."[35] They know when it is legally necessary and morally appropriate to refer students to such trained professionals or parents. As a general guideline, a student has a right to confidentiality only with such trained and certified professionals and not with teachers. In some states teachers have a legal mandate to disclose personal remarks made by a student when it becomes obvious that such a student is in a situation which is harmful to him/her self or is harmful to others.[36]

Although their credibility depends on the degree to which they live by Jesus' example, religious educators need not be perfect and need not have all the answers in order to be effective mentors to young persons. In fact, the wisdom which religious educators have to offer often comes as a result of their own learning from past mistakes and struggling through current questions. When all is said and done, what young persons are actually seeking from their mentors is a listening ear, an open heart, and a framework from which they can make good decisions. Religious educators of the '90s know that some of the most meaningful evangelization they can offer is often done on a one-to-one basis.

Remember Teresa Aparicio's students? At their ten-year reunion, they will most likely remember what kind of mentor and role-model she was for them. We religious educators will not be measured by how well our students did on their religion tests. We will be measured by the degree to which we found Christ in the young people as we brought Christ to the young people we were called to serve.

Conclusion: The High School's Search for Meaning and Belonging

In a time marked by a paucity of heroes and driven by short-term expediency, religion teachers in Catholic schools are called to provide students with life-giving alternatives. We are called to help young persons see that human beings are to be judged not by the color of their skin nor by the content of their wallets, but by the content of their character. We are called to help students make the connection between individual attitudes, values, behaviors, and their impact on the common good of society. We are called to help students understand that the dominion which humanity has been given over creation is one of stewardship and not ownership. We are called to help students see that the "glory of God is a human being fully alive," that Jesus Christ has shown how a mean-

ingful life is one lived with love, knowledge, wisdom, justice, service, and hope.

In the book, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, the authors point out that one of the reasons why Catholic schools have been so effective is that they are guided by an "inspirational ideology."[37] The inspirational vision of Catholic education is one which is based on the Gospel of Christ and the wisdom of the Catholic faith. This vision gives our students an interpretation of the meaning and purpose of life which is as realistic as it is hopeful. Those of us in religious education are on the front lines of this vision and know what a difference it makes in the lives of our students.

While religion teachers face many challenges, they are very important persons in their students' lives. As they grow cognitively and morally, adolescents are very keen on the "way it should be." It is part of their job description to be critical and idealistic. As a result they can be relentless in the face of logical inconsistencies and hypocrisy (both real and imagined). The failure of the "Baby Boomer" generation[38] to provide its heirs with a common moral vision and a reason for living, other than the pursuit of immediate gratification, has led many adolescents to become jaded and cynical. Especially for those who are unchurched or underchurched, religion teachers are important role models of Christian faith and hope in a complex and fast-paced world. Although it might not be readily apparent on any given day, students in Catholic high schools really do pay attention to and remember what their religion teachers say. Religion teachers in Catholic high schools are called now more than ever to believe what they teach, and teach what they believe.

Although, like Teresa, our work can keep us awake in the middle of the night, being a religious educator is a privilege. Where else can one discuss the major questions of life as well as important modern issues in a way that gives others hope for the future? In a society divided and overly dominated by the false values mentioned above, the work which religious educators do is more important than ever. Young people today are searching for a sense of belonging and for honest answers to their questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives. Through their efforts religious educators in Catholic schools can help students realize that the Church can give them a sense of belonging and that Jesus' Gospel does give life-giving answers.

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Notes

1. Those with a keen eye will recognize this as a variation of one of the key "answers" from the Baltimore Catechism. Although modern religious education has thankfully (for the most part) outgrown the methodology of the Baltimore Catechism, I find myself re-appropriating the power and beautiful simplicity of this answer to the question, "Why did God make me?"

2. Groome, Thomas H. *Christian Religious Education*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980: 191-195.

3. Groome, 188-191.

4. Groome, 184ff. For a further development of Groome's vision of Christian Religious Education see his *Sharing the Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991, especially pages 14-25 for his thoughts on the purpose and mission of Christian religious education, and pages 26-35, 113-115 for his theory on the utilization of "conative pedagogy" as an approach to religious education.

5. DiGiacomo, James J., S.J. *Teaching Religion in a Catholic Secondary School*. Washington, D.C.: Natinal Catholic Educational Association, 1989: 46-48.

6. Obviously, this "better able" aspect will be different for each person in the classroom.

7. cf. Marisa Crawford and Graham Rossiter, *Missionaries to a Teenage Culture: Religious Education in a Time of Rapid Change.* Sydney: Christian Brothers Province Resource Group, 1988, Chapters 4 and 5 for an excellent discussion on this debate.

8. An effective religion teacher, according to G. Patrick Ziemann, currently bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa in California, is one who teaches students how to: 1) revere Scripture; 2) listen for God's love for us in Scripture; and 3) inquire critically into the meaning of Scripture. "Instead of simply teaching or explaining the Scriptures to the students, we should encourage them to inquire into the Word of God, to ask questions, not only to obtain answers but also to promote interest and excitement for God's message. So often we teach our students the answers to questions they are not interested in, and hence, little learning or enthusiasm is effected....Once their enthusiasm is generated, the answers have a greater menaing and learning is more easily effected." "Don't Be Afraid to Use Scripture." In *The Religion Teacher's Handbook: The Key to Confidence.* Milwaukee: HI-TIME Publishers, 1979:55.

9. Crawford and Rossiter, 68.

10. cf. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School,* The Congregation for Catholic Education (1988), n. 69: "The distinction between religious instruction and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education."

11. Ibid, pp. 68.

12. Here some theological training (either coursework or intense inservice experience) is critical. The development of the Church's trinitarian and christological doctrines took place over several centuries, the duration of which was devoted to the identification of language that would be faithful to God's self-disclosure as three persons in one Godhead. Over the centuries the Church and its thinkers have used a variety of analogies from creation and human experience to help the faithful understand the paradox of the Trinity. The use of these analogies, while

helpful, must always be done judiciously lest both teachers' and students' understanding of the Trinity be based on heretical models (epecially that of "Modalism," "Subordinationism," and "Tritheism). Two good resources for answers to tricky trinity and christology question are: Gerald O'Collins, SJ, and Edward G. Farrugia, SJ, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, (New York, Paulist Press: 1991) and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, *A Christological Catechism: New Testament Answers*, (New York, Paulist Press: 1991).

13. I think it was Leo Joseph Cardinal Suenens who said this.

14. cf. I Corinthians 1: 10-17 (Paul's critique of those who emphasize their subjective interpretations instead of the paradox of the Cross) and I Cor. 3: 5-9 (Paul's articulation of the proper role played by those who proclaim the Gospel).

15. cf. *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, n. 96: "The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved. But the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher; this witness is what brings the content of the lessons to life. Teachers of religion, therefore, must be men and women endowed with many gifts, both natural and supernatural, who are also capable of giving witness to these gifts;...Most of all, students should be able to recognize authentic human qualities in their teachers. They are the teachers of faith; however, like Christ, they must also be teachers of what it means to be human. This...includes such things as affection, tact, understanding, serenity of spirit, a balanced judgment, patience in listening to others and prudence in the way they respond, and finally, availability for personal meetings and conversations with students. A teacher who has a clear vision of the Christian milieu and lives in accord with it will be able to help young people develop a similar vision, and will give them the inspiration they need to put it into practice."

16. DiGiacomo, p. 58.

17. Ibid, p. 62.

18. Crawford and Rossiter, pp. 1-4.

19. After many years of watching freshmen and sophomore students eat in cafeterias (and watching the behavior of juniors and seniors at

dances) one begins to wonder if this is not an apt description after all!

20. Charles M. Shelton, SJ, *Adolescent Sprituality: Pastoral Ministry for High School and College Youth,* (Chicago, Loyola University Press: 1938), pp. 33-34, 70-73, and 144-145. For a highly readable and very practical overview of adolescent development, see Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children,* (Toronto, Bantam Books: 1983), especially chapters 9-10.

21. cf. *To Teach as Jesus Did,* National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C., NCCB: 1972), n. 103: "Instruction in religious truth and values is an integral part of the [Catholic school's] program. It is not one more subject alongside the rest, but instead it is perceived and functions as the underlying reality in which the student's experience of learning and living achieve their coherence and their deepest meaning."

22. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* (New York, Catholic Book Publishing Co.: 1994). This is proving to be a valuable resource for veteran and novice religion teachers as an authoritative expression of specfic Church doctrines.

23. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School,* n. 97.

24. Local diocesan departments of education should also give serious thought to the establishment of minimum "standards" regarding the professional preparation and training of religion teachers. In order to give principals flexibility regarding hiring of persons who do not meet such standards, a "grace period" could be allowed during which such teachers would be required to take coursework which would enable them to attain the background they need.

25. William J. O'Malley, SJ, *Becoming a Catechist,* (New York, Paulist Press: 1992), p. 1-2.

26. James Heft, SM, *Catholic Education: Pattern and Possibilities,* Presentation at "Patterns and Possibilities" conference sponsored by the NCEA (June 1995).

27. National Catholic Educational Association, *The Heart of the Matter.* Washington, DC: 1990.

28. Crawford and Rossiter, p. 112-113.

29. DiGiacomo, pp. 41-42. His comparison of religious education to "making spaghetti" is an accurate description of what effective religious educators do on a daily basis.

30. I was introduced to this concept in Sr. Mary Peter Traviss' *Moral Development* course I took at the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership (University of San Francisco).

31. Ron Nuzzi, PhD. *Multiple Intelligences in Religious Education*, presentation given at "Patterns and Possibilities" conference sponsored by the NCEA (June 25, 1995).

32. Anthony S. Bryk, Valerie E. Lee, Peter B. Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 99-100. The authors point out the "ordinariness" of the teaching methods employed in the Catholic schools they observed in their longitudinal study. Despite this, they observed that students in Catholic schools were highly engaged in classroom activities. They attribute this student engagement to the dedication, vision, and personalism of Catholic school teachers and the communal spirit in Catholic schools. In the question and answer session which followed her keynote address at the University of San Francisco's Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership's 25th Anniversary Symposium, Valerie Lee did comment, however, that, one of the few areas in which Catholic high schools need improvement is in the area of utilizing more creative and student-centered teaching methods.

33. Many teachers note how teenagers today experience or are exposed to more "intense" situations at younger and younger ages. Teenagers are also more willing to bring up and discuss topics which, until recently, were considered taboo.

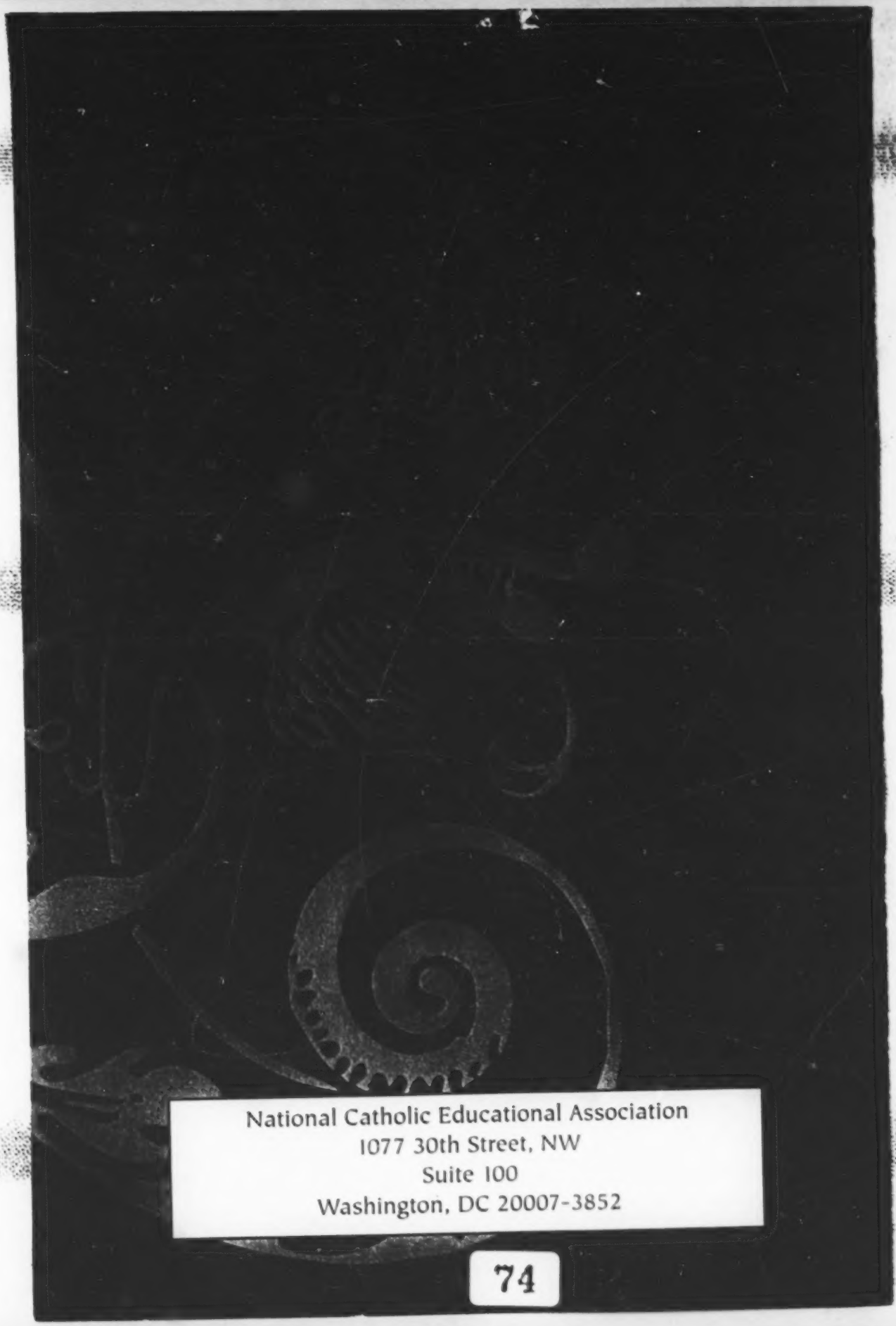
34. On the surface, this may seem to contradict the above-mentioned "prohibition" against religious educators frequently disclosing their personal opinions, biases, questions and concerns. Experienced religious educators know that much of what they do is a "balancing act" between course content and personal experience. As in most things, moderation is the best policy.

35. Unless, of course, the religion teacher is a Catholic priest who is discussing a student's personal matters in the context of the Sacrament of Reconciliation!

36. Mary Angela Shaughnessy, *NCEA Notes*, (January 1996).

37. Bryk, Lee, and Holland, p. 303.

38. So much for my critique of those who "label" entire generational groups!



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